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February 21, 2020

Chairman Kumar Barve
Vice-Chair Dana Stein
House Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: HB 1176 Healthy Soils Practices
Testimony of MPEN/ Smart on Pesticides Coalition
In Support WITH SPONSOR AMENDMENTS

Dear Chairman Barve and Vice-Chairman Stein:

On behalf of Maryland Pesticide Education Network (MPEN), of which I am a Board Member, and the Smart on Pesticides Coalition, a group of 105 Maryland member organizations and businesses which is facilitated by MPEN, I write in support of Delegate Stein's HB 1176 with sponsor amendments.

House Bill 1176 establishes a pilot Healthy Soils Grant Program, to make grants available for voluntary projects that increase carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions on agricultural lands to assist in mitigating climate change. Practices known to build soil health and sequester carbon will be incentivized.

I have led an MPEN team which has done extensive research into the farming practices which can be undertaken by Maryland farmers to optimize carbon sequestration. Based on that research, both as a representative of MPEN and as a Maryland farmer, some of the more important practices that can be adopted to increase the biological activity of the soil and thus store carbon that are covered in HB 1176 and shall be covered by the sponsor's amendments are the following:

(1) Because cover crops can productively sequester carbon all year and can do so with more effectiveness with seed mixes and over longer periods of time, cover crops planted during the growing season, planted in multi-species mixes, and planted for longer durations should be recognized, as well as shorter-term winter cover crops alone.

(2) Because carbon is sequestered in deep-rooted permanent perennial plantings such as grass buffer strips, tree and shrub buffer strips, wetlands, forestlands, and meadows, the installation and maintenance of these practices should be recognized. (Notably federal CRP and CREP programs fund them but they are under-utilized in Maryland because landowners are unaware of them.)

(3) Because many synthetic pesticide, herbicide, fungicide and fertilizer inputs impair the biological activity of the soil and thus its ability to sequester carbon, organic practices which prohibit such synthetics should be recognized as a healthy soil practice.

(4) Because the conversion of cropland to pastured animal production is recognized as an optimal practice to sequester carbon, conversion of cropland (and of CAFO animal production) to pastured animals should be a recognized practice.

(5) Increasing the fungal biomass in the soil, and increasing the fungal/bacterial balance in the soil, is emerging as a practice which can dramatically increase the amount of carbon stored in the soil, and as emerging

science support this practice, it should be recognized.

(6) Reduced or conservation tillage is important to avoid soil disturbance but it impacts only the top inches of soil and cannot support optimal carbon storage on its own.

Very Truly Yours,

Cleo P. Braver on behalf of MPEN, SOPC