

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB1312
Halting Bay Pollution Act**

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart

March 4, 2019 • Environment and Transportation Committee

What the Bill Does

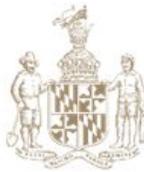
A Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) is a large animal feeding operation that discharges or proposes to discharge pollutants. **HB1312 prohibits the Maryland Department of the Environment from issuing a discharge permit for a new, especially large CAFO or an expansion of an existing, especially large CAFO.**

Why the Bill Matters

The poultry industry has become increasingly dominated by CAFOs, in Maryland and across the United States. Broiler production is the most vertically integrated of all livestock industries, with 96% of all birds raised under production contracts. Today, a small handful of corporations including Perdue and Mountaire Farms control a system for producing broiler chickens that is radically different than the industry's smaller, family-run origins— and that concentrates significantly more birds on each site. The company, or “integrator,” owns the birds and contracts with farmers, called “contract growers,” to raise them. The average Maryland contract grower now has at least six chicken houses and raises half a million birds per year.

The industry continues to expand. Over the past five years, the Delmarva Peninsula built 400 new chicken houses and increased its broiler production by over half a billion pounds per year. The region's farms are raising more chickens, but on fewer farms, because farm size has been increasing. In Maryland, this means that while the number of contract broiler operations fell by almost a quarter from 2002 to 2017, the number of chickens produced annually increased by 20 million. In 2017, Maryland's 307 million broiler chickens raised under contract generated a whopping 400,000 tons of litter.

HB1312 is necessary for two reasons. First, CAFO emissions are linked with negative health consequences. A 2017 study found residential proximity to CAFOs was associated with asthma



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medication orders and hospitalizations.¹ A 2015 meta analysis found consistent correlations between living near CAFOs and respiratory problems and other health issues.² The Environmental Integrity Project estimates that each year, the typical broiler operation on the Eastern Shore emits 19 to 24 tons of ammonia, a respiratory irritant linked to lung disease. Childhood asthma rates in Wicomico County three times the national average, and respiratory disease is 54% higher than the state average.

Exposure to air pollutants like ammonia and particulate matter is associated with adverse health outcomes at certain levels. But because of a lack of air monitoring on the Shore, no one knows how much of these contaminants residents are being exposed to. In 2019, MDE committed to installing two air quality monitoring stations on the Lower Eastern Shore. We should halt construction until we receive results from those stations.

Second, the poultry litter on the Eastern Shore is approaching unmanageable levels. When agricultural fields are oversaturated with litter, excess phosphorus and nitrogen run off into nearby streams and then into the ecologically fragile Chesapeake Bay. The excess nutrients fuel algal blooms that smother underwater grasses and produce low-oxygen dead zones that kill fish and other aquatic species. The Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) is nearing implementation, but some industry groups requested a PMT delay in the fall because current manure levels are already untenable. CAFO expansion will only make this problem worse, complicating our ability to meet the EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) goals. Until the PMT is fully implemented, we should limit the ability of the poultry industry to build new factory farms.

Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably

The expansion of the industry poses uncertain threats to the health of Maryland residents and the ecological health of the Chesapeake Bay. Until we know more, we should move to halt construction of especially large factory farms. I urge a favorable report.

¹ Rasmussen, S.G.; Casey, J.A.; Bandeen-Roche, K.; Schwartz, B.S. Proximity to Industrial Food Animal Production and Asthma Exacerbations in Pennsylvania, 2005–2012. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* (2017).

² Casey, J.A., Kim, B.F., Larsen, J. *et al.* Industrial Food Animal Production and Community Health. *Curr Envir Health Rpt* 2, 259–271 (2015).