



February 16, 2022

Hipcamp, Inc
Mason Smith
Head of Government and Community Relations
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Re: Favorable Comment for Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee Regarding House Bill 558

Dear Delegate Clark and Esteemed Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Hipcamp Inc. is grateful for the opportunity to offer comments on House Bill 558 for the purpose of altering the state's definition of "agritourism." **We thank you for addressing this meaningful issue and urge you to advance the ordinance as drafted.**

My name is Mason Smith and I lead Government and Community Relations for Hipcamp. Hipcamp is a website and app that allows farmers, ranchers, and other local landowners to share their land with travelers looking for new and unique places to stay, camp, and get outside.

Hipcamp started in 2013 and today we partner with landowners who welcome campers in more than 500,000 campsites across Canada, Australia, and all 50 US states. Since we started, Hipcamp has helped people spend almost 1.5 million nights outside. Last year alone, Hipcamp hosts in the US earned more than \$31 million.

Our community of landowners set their own prices and campers book and pay for their stay directly through Hipcamp. Hosts keep 90% of what the campers pay. Hipcamp hosts are long-time landowners who have lived in their county for an average of 19 years. About half of our hosts are farmers and ranchers.

The proposed revisions to the definition of agritourism would more easily allow farmers across Maryland to safely welcome campers and other folks participating in incidental overnight stays. **Updating the definition of agritourism to include camping and incidental stays is beneficial in three main ways.**

Firstly, agritourism is a huge opportunity for Maryland farmers who need to adopt new and diverse revenue streams to stay economically viable. With the rising cost of land, water, and agricultural inputs, our sustainable agricultural community needs every opportunity to

develop revenue streams that allow farmers to keep working lands working. Incidental camping is a big part of this potential, and is already a critical source of revenue for many to hedge against low commodity prices and higher production costs. In 2021, Maryland hosts using our platform earned more than \$200,000 in supplemental income from welcoming campers to their lands.

Secondly, camping on farms supports small businesses and local communities. During an average visit, each camper who travels through Hipcamp spends \$300 at local restaurants, cafes, gear shops, farm stands, and more, providing sustainable revenue for small businesses and stimulating the local economy with tourism dollars. Farm stay hosts are also job creators — they directly employ local community members with the revenue they earn via Hipcamp and their guests' spending creates additional jobs in the community.

Finally, family-friendly agritourism activities such as camping are an invaluable tool to promote and grow the state's agricultural heritage. Farm stays directly expose people — including and especially children — to agricultural lands and lifestyles. The proposed amendments to the definition of agritourism will make it easier to introduce the state's next generation of farmers and consumers to working lands.

By prioritizing policies to make camping and other incidental outdoor stays more accessible for rural landowners, you can help protect two of the state's signature industries — agriculture and tourism. **Maryland's sustainable agricultural community would benefit greatly from the proposed, simple revisions to the state's definition of agritourism. We urge you to please advance the bill as drafted.**

Sincerely,

Mason Smith
Head of Government and Community Relations
Hipcamp, Inc.