

Maryland PIRG

HB516: Agriculture - Use of Antimicrobial Drugs - Reporting Education, Energy and the Environment

March 23, 2023

Emily Scarr, Maryland PIRG

Favorable

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future.

Maryland PIRG supports HB516 to update the reporting timeline for the Department of Agriculture on the use of medically important antimicrobial drugs for large Maryland farms. Adjusting the timeline will allow the Department more time to compile and analyze data they have received from licensed veterinarians on antibiotics used on farms.

Background:

In 2019, the General Assembly passed an updated [Keep Antibiotics Effective Act](#) which [became law without the signature of then Gov. Hogan](#). The law ensures that farmers in Maryland restrict antibiotic use on livestock and poultry when animals are not sick and also collects important data regarding antibiotic use on farms.

Maryland PIRG and the [The Maryland Campaign to Keep Antibiotics Working](#), a wide array of public health, labor, business, and environmental organizations, supported the bill.

Without antibiotics, cancer treatments and routine surgeries would become too dangerous to perform because of risk of infection. Before antibiotics, infections were the leading cause of death in America. That danger declined for decades. But as resistant bacteria render these drugs less effective, deaths associated with drug-resistant infections were eclipsed only by those attributable to heart disease and stroke globally. In the United States, one estimate suggests that drug-resistant infections kill up to 162,000 people and sicken at least 2 million people every year. The annual estimated cost in the United States of such infections exceeds \$55 billion per year.

Ending the routine use of antibiotics in agriculture has been identified by the World Health Organization, American Academy of Pediatrics, and other leading health groups as a key strategy to fight the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance.

In the United States, nearly two-thirds of the medically important antibiotics are sold for use on livestock and poultry. Much of it is used not to treat sick animals but rather to compensate for poor diets and cramped, unhygienic living conditions. This routine use of antibiotics accelerates the development of drug-resistant bacteria which can travel off of farms and into our communities through human-to-animal contact, contaminated food, insects, and environmental factors including water run-off, dirt and airborne dust.

Laws such as the Keep Antibiotics Effective Act are our best defense against this mounting menace. We hope you'll support this measure to help make the law's reporting requirements more effective.

We respectfully request a favorable report.

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