

BRENNAN STARKEY
OLDFIELD POINT FARMS

P.O. Box 250
Galena, Maryland 21635

e.mail: brennanstarkey@gmail.com

Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill SB0932 as a farmer and conservationist. Oldfield Point Farms is a 1,400 acre contiguous farm bordered on three sides by water- the Sassafrass River to the North, Dyer Creek to the West, and Woodland Creek to the East. We grow a diverse variety of crops including spinach, lima beans, tomatoes, and sweet corn for freezer and canning processors and rotate those crops with soybeans, corn, wheat, and barley.

Early in my farming career I became painfully aware of the declining water quality seen in the Chesapeake Bay and Tributaries due to the overloading of nutrients and sediment, especially Nitrogen and Phosphorous. Agricultural operations were the largest nonpoint source contributors.

I was appointed by Governor Glendening to the Upper Eastern Shore Tributary Strategy Team in 1995. It was one of the first public/private partnerships of its kind. I became active in the Chester River Association and helped develop projects with farmers on the Eastern Shore to identify and implement practices which would reduce and capture nutrients. I was elected Chair of ShoreRivers during the merger of three watershed organizations and served in that position for six years as the organization grew. The Agricultural Program of ShoreRivers is widely recognized as one of the most effective groups working with the farming community to identify and implement restoration and nutrient reduction opportunities.

I've seen the tremendous amount of time, effort, and resources the State, the farming community, and private organizations have invested over the past 27 years to address nutrient loading. I personally live and work where land meets water. Our farming operation recently received the Cooperator of the Decade award from our County Soil Conservation District. We have planted over 200 acres of buffers and made changes in our operation to minimize the loss of nutrients.

The recent CESR Report presented by the Chesapeake Bay Program was discouraging and sobering. In spite of widespread adoption of cover crops, precision nutrient application, no-till planting, manure regulations, and enrollment in CRP agriculture remains the largest nonpoint source of nutrients in the Chesapeake watershed.

SB 0932 will help accelerate restoration and reduction efforts in the most critical agricultural areas – the shallow water and near shore farm land- by providing increased funding for coordinated and targeted restoration practices across one or multiple agricultural operations. Prioritizing state funds to support best management practices in locations most likely to have a short-term benefit to water quality, habitat, and public health will result in the greatest immediate impact.

SB0932 will also encourage a more comprehensive approach to restoration and nutrient reduction to farmland in the Critical Areas through coordination of different practices that will work in concert to achieve the highest reductions which will be verified through the monitoring components of the grant programs.

Farmers are proud to be the stewards of a large percentage of land in the state. On the Eastern Shore a large percentage of the Critical Area remains in farmland, much of it in Conservation Easements. Farmers have a unique connection to, and reliance on, the health of their soil and the fertility of their ground. In addition to the food and fiber produced, farms provide the habitat for pollinators, game species, amphibians, waterfowl and interior forest dwelling birds.

I am confident there will be a very positive response by the farming community to the opportunities for restoration and reduction presented in SB0932. I thank the Committee for their serious and thoughtful consideration of this Bill and strongly support a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Brennan Starkey