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**SUPPORT: HB 1042 - Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program -
Established**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV supports HB 1042 - Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program -
Established and we thank Delegate Guzzone for introducing this important bill.

Runoff from agricultural production fields continues to be a challenge that hampers Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts. While Maryland has made some progress in implementing conservation practices to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff from farm fields, there is still a wide gap between the volume of these water pollutants to be captured and the opportunities to install cost-effective practices to address them. Facing a lack of progress in the Chesapeake Bay Partnerships restoration goals, in May of 2023, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to the Chesapeake Bay Program released a report called the Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR), in which they apply the most up to date scientific analysis to recommend what changes are needed to achieve greater success in the restoration effort.¹ This legislation responds to that report's recommendations for policy modifications to address nonpoint source pollution. Specifically, regarding nonpoint source pollutants, like those from the agricultural sector. CESR recommends two policy actions that HB 1042 incorporates. Namely, targeting BMP implementation to areas most likely to demonstrate a benefit, and shifting focus from a simple accounting of practices implemented to instead evaluate which practices produce the greatest reductions through monitoring and verifying outcomes. If fully and properly implemented, HB 1042 would provide meaningful and significant water quality improvements in Maryland.

If we are going to be effective in working with agricultural operators on a voluntary basis for conservation practice uptake, we must utilize the tools we have for this wisely. This bill represents a prudent use of resources, in part, by working with agricultural producers willing to install BMPs through established programs and allowing them to receive funding for multiple effective practices. But just installing more practices will not necessarily achieve improved water quality. In the recently released Analysis of the FY 2025 Maryland Executive Budget, the Maryland Department of Legislative Services notes that Maryland Department of Agriculture has "not

¹ Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response. An Independent Report from the Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). Chesapeake Bay Program. Annapolis, MD. May 2023. (<https://www.chesapeake.org/stac/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CESR-Executive-Summary.pdf>)

embraced the idea of spatially targeting [Maryland Agricultural Cost-Share] funding for best management practices (BMP) to high nutrient and sediment loss agricultural operations at the farm or field level in order to boost agricultural BMP implementation for Chesapeake Bay restoration.² This bill addresses the need to take a targeted approach to BMP installation, ensuring the best practices are used in the best places to achieve water quality restoration goals.

In addition to prioritizing the use of state funds for BMP implementation in areas most likely to achieve short-term beneficial impact on water quality, HB 1042 also emphasizes practices where public health and resiliency benefits will result as well. For an example of how this could be implemented, consider the air pollution resulting from concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. If unmitigated, these facilities contribute millions of pounds of nutrient pollution to surface water through deposition (when pollutants transported by air enter waterways). In addition, particulate matter, a dangerous air contaminant that harms human health, is also released from CAFOs. Installing simple, cost-effective mitigation measures like planting the right type of vegetation where CAFOs discharge polluted air can both capture pollutants harmful to human health and reduce nutrients that contribute to the Chesapeake Bay's decline. Both targeting efforts and emphasizing those practices that provide co-benefits such as this, is another way to ensure we are utilizing our state resources in the best way possible.

As Maryland and the other states within the Chesapeake Bay watershed face the 2025 deadline for Bay Restoration goals with a recognition that we are off target, it is imperative we implement changes to the standard operating procedures that have failed to achieve the full restoration we seek. HB 1042 will do that, addressing some of the most challenging pollution sources across our watershed using the most up to date and best available science and tools now available. Maryland LCV urges a favorable report on this important legislation.

² Analysis of the FY 2025 Maryland Executive Budget, 2024. LA00 - Department of Agriculture - Capital. Page 2. (<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2025fy-budget-docs-capital-LA00-Department-of-Agriculture.pdf>)