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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 481 - Natural Resources - Antlerless Deer Hunting Programs – Authorization  
Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee  
February 16, 2024

**The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 481 – Natural Resources – Antlerless Deer Hunting Programs – Authorization.** House Bill 481 would allow the Department of Natural Resources to conduct an antlerless deer hunting program in January as a means of reducing crop damage.

The primary objective of this initiative is to tackle the issue of overpopulation of antlerless deer on the lower shore. Since many hunters tend to hunt only for bucks, the population of antlerless deer has grown tremendously in this region. The event that has been organized is exclusively for hunting antlerless deer, and its sole purpose is to bring down the overpopulation. The hunters who take part in the event can either keep the deer they catch or donate them to the local food bank.

During the Maryland Deer Summit (hosted on May 11, 2023, at the Maryland Department of Agriculture), it was estimated by the Maryland Farm Bureau that deer cause about \$50 in damage per acre, which could add up to \$55 million statewide. Add in neighboring states, where farmers also have problems with deer, and the number would be higher still.

Deer overpopulation can be quite a detriment to rural communities, specifically farms, due to crop damage. The state of Maryland has a high density of deer to suitable habitat, which often leads to conflicts with farmers, vehicle drivers, and homeowners. To control the overpopulation of deer, it is important to practice responsible hunting and utilize depredation permits. By doing so, we can help reduce the impact of deer on crops, vehicles, and homes.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 481.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”