

SB 29 City Soil Conservation District - Establishm

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Position: FAV

CORY V. McCRAY
Legislative District 45
Baltimore City

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Vice Chair, Capital Budget

Pensions

Chair, Public Safety, Transportation,
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Vote Yes on Senate Bill 29

Bill Title: Baltimore City Soil Conservation District - Establishment - Requirements
Hearing Date: January 25, 2023, Education, Energy, and the Environment

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing today to request your support for Senate Bill 29 (Baltimore City Soil Conservation District – Establishment – Requirements). In past years, we have put in place the statutory requirements to establish a Soil Conservation District in Baltimore City, as with the other twenty-three jurisdictions. After a strong discussion with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, we now have a bill to set the requirements and the structure.

A Soil Conservation District in Baltimore City will bolster environmental sustainability efforts, restore natural resources, and provide new opportunities for the constituents of the City of Baltimore to impact and interact more with our environment. Senate Bill 29 sets the formal structure to give the Department of Agriculture formal notice when the establishment begins, gives the Mayor of Baltimore the authority to appoint the board of supervisors for our respective jurisdiction, engages the Secretary of State for the official record, and aligns Baltimore City with the appropriation as all other soil conversation districts.

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 29, to ensure that we are providing the greatest opportunity for our environment to thrive for future generations.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cory V. McCray'.

Cory V. McCray
State Senator

SB 29_CBF_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

Senate Bill 29

Baltimore City Soil Conservation District – Establishment – Requirements

Date: January 25, 2023	Position: Support
To: Education, Energy, and the Environment	From: David Tana Farm Partnership Manager

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB0029 which provides for the establishment of a Baltimore City Soil Conservation District through updates to the State Code to allow for the appointment of soil conservation district supervisors and clarify the roles of the Mayor of Baltimore City and the Secretary of State, and make other technical and procedural changes to allow the district to be formed.

A Baltimore City-based Soil Conservation District will provide technical assistance needed to further urban agriculture.

Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) provide technical assistance and facilitate conservation funding for farming practices nationwide. SCDs gather local, state and federal agency staff in one office to provide resources to farmers, including conservation practices that protect water quality and prevent pollution runoff. Maryland currently has twenty-four SCDs, one for each County except Frederick County which has two, the Frederick and Catocin soil conservation district.¹

Farming in Baltimore City consists of primarily urban agriculture which comes with a unique set of technical assistance challenges and funding needs. Many urban farms grow vegetables in “hoop houses,” which are greenhouses that extend the growing season. One of the limiting factors for Baltimore City farms is water, irrigation for their crops.

Funding for hoop houses, and technical assistance to overcome irrigation challenges could be provided by a Soil Conservation District office. For example, staff could assist urban farmers tap funding from the Federal USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for hoop houses. The State NRCS Conservation team provides \$100,000 annually to each SCD in Maryland through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to fund local farming projects.²

Urban agriculture creates green spaces and provide healthy produce to residents

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has worked with Baltimore City in the greening of abandoned lots. CBF supports conservation programs including urban farming that can preserve a green print within a developed area. Green space can help mitigate stormwater runoff into local waterways and the Bay. With this legislation, Baltimore City would have assistance through a District office to target urban farming practices to mitigate climate change, improve water quality, build healthy soils and reduce the amount of pollution in local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

¹ Maryland Department of Agriculture, [Soil Conservation Districts](#), last visited 01.18.2023.

² United States Department of Agriculture, National Resources Conservation Service, [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), last visited 01.18.2023.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation also seeks to increase local food production and providing healthy food in food priority areas. The COVID pandemic highlighted disparities and health risks associated with lack of access to nutritious food. CBF supports local food purchases through its Buy Fresh Buy Local Chesapeake program which helps consumers, sustainable farms, and businesses find each other and support efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 29. For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney at mstegman@cbf.org.

SB0029_nlittle_fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Neith Little

Position: FAV

January 25, 2023

Testimony before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 29 Baltimore City Soil Conservation District - Establishment – Requirements
Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Thank you for considering the important issue of expanding support for urban agriculture. I am writing to share my experiences providing technical assistance to and conducting needs assessments of urban farmers.

I am aware of about 30 farms currently operating in Baltimore City. Two-thirds of those are soil-based outdoor farms, which could potentially benefit from Soil Conservation District assistance (SCD), such as having a soil conservation plan written by SCD staff.

Based on a 2018 survey that I conducted, a significantly higher proportion of urban farmers in Maryland identify as female (48%) or African American / Black (37%) compared to the general Maryland farming population (19% and 1%, respectively).

The majority of urban farmers who responded to the 2018 survey grow fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers in land-based production systems using raised-beds, in-ground growing, and high tunnels.

Urban farmers prioritized balancing numerous goals, including producing food for themselves and their communities, creating jobs, and providing income for themselves.

Financially, urban farmers were similar to the general farming population, with about half of respondents farming part-time and selling less than \$10,000 of farm products.

In both the 2018 survey and a broader 2020 survey of Northeast US urban growers (Richardson et al., unpublished data), respondents identified navigating bureaucratic processes as a key barrier with which they needed assistance. One 2020 survey respondent wrote in *“taxes, regulations, bureaucracy, government licensing, permitting.... There is no road map, and most agencies don’t know what to do with us.”*

It is my belief that SB 29 will benefit the farmers in Baltimore City and urge a favorable report. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Neith Little
Urban Agriculture Extension Educator
University of Maryland Extension, Baltimore City Office

References

Little, N. G., McCoy, T., Wang, C., & Dill, S. P. (2019). Results of a needs assessment of urban farmers in Maryland. *Journal of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents*, 12(1), 1–8. <https://www.nacaa.com/journal/452eeb58-36c3-44ac-978d-f2999c49ddb9>

Little, N. (2021). What is urban agriculture? University of Maryland Extension Factsheet 1169 <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/what-urban-agriculture>

Richardson, M., Thompson, M.J., Carson, A.D., Taylor, J.R., Rangarajan, A. VanVranken, R., Hanumappa, M. Little, N.G. (unpublished data) A profile of urban agricultural growers, organizations, their needs, and differences based on profit status in the northeastern United States.

Senate Bill 29 - MASCD - Information.pdf

Uploaded by: Jen Nelson

Position: INFO



January 25, 2023

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chairman
Senate Education, Energy, & Environment Committee

Re: Senate Bill 29 – Baltimore City Soil Conservation District - Establishment – Requirements

Position: **Informational**

Chairman Feldman & Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) I am providing information regarding the establishment of a Baltimore City Soil Conservation District. MASCD, incorporated in 1956, promotes practical and effective soil, water, and natural resource related programs to all Marylanders. Through individual conservation districts MASCD provides leadership, education, cooperation, and local direction, on a voluntary basis, promoting these initiatives.

MASCD has supported the formation of a Baltimore City Soil Conservation District since 1993 and our organization believes that establishing a conservation district in Baltimore City will provide the technical and financial resources needed to navigate issues specific to urban farmers. Baltimore City farmers currently receive support from many similar sources as other farmers in the state. They receive technical assistance through the University of Maryland Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. It is important to us that a new district follows a similar structure to existing districts because it connects them to a network that is beneficial for their success. Senate Bill 29 begins the necessary conversation, but the framework for formation is not consistent with its neighboring jurisdictions as the oversight from the State Soil Conservation Committee is absent in the bill. The State Soil Conservation Committee makes recommendations to MDA about its programs and policies and serves as a forum for districts to share information with each other, and that connectivity and representation are both important functions of any conservation district.

MASCD contains thousands of success stories ranging from innovative conservation techniques to waterway management. Conservation districts are locally led to address soil and water issues at the district level while also connecting their farmers and residents to resources at the state and federal level. Our shared success is the result of a network of partners established through a fair and just process in which the agricultural communities throughout the State are appointed and serve the common goal of their communities. A unified future for agriculture in the State of Maryland has proven to be effective when we can work together.

Thank you for your kind consideration and attention to this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jen Nelson, Executive Director
Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts