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**Testimony in Support of SB 0589 - Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland – Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission – Funding**

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Daniel A. Donohue and I am a farmer. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 0589, which aims to increase the appropriation for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), which is a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, from the Cigarette Restitution Fund.

The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission plays a pivotal role in supporting local farmers, promoting agricultural education, and fostering sustainable practices.

It is important to note that this is not new funding they are seeking, it's current existing funding that comes into the state every year from the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF), of which 5% was promised to SMADC twenty years ago upon their creation during the Tobacco Buyout. Despite what was written at that time, SMADC has consistently gotten less than that, and has been operating on only \$900,000 a year from that fund.

This bill asks that SMADC receive at least \$1 million annually or up to the original 5% of the CRF as promised, in perpetuity.

The CRF fund is continual and non-lapsing and the only place that money can go is to the Maryland Department of Health or to SMADC. The Health Department gets over \$30 million a year from this fund alone, plus their additional funding. SMADC just requests their fair share of the CRF so they can continue to support the farmers in their region and across the state who are growing healthy food and a healthy community.

The proposed increase in funding to at least \$1,000,000 is essential for the following reasons:

**Supporting Agricultural Innovation:** The additional funds will enable the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission to invest in innovative initiatives that benefit local farmers, promote sustainable practices, and enhance overall agricultural productivity.

**Economic Impact:** Agriculture is a cornerstone of our local economy, and increased funding will positively impact the financial well-being of our farmers, contributing to the economic vitality of Southern Maryland.

**Educational Programs:** The Commission plays a vital role in educating our community about the importance of agriculture. The increased funding will allow for expanded educational programs, ensuring that residents are informed about the value of sustainable farming practices.

It is worth noting that last fiscal year, with just their \$900,000 in base funding, SMADC was able to leverage that to bring in over \$3 million additional dollars in grants. SMADC and the farmers they serve are a proven worthwhile return on investment.

I was asked to join the SMADC Board as a Prince George's County representative in 2019 and continue to serve. I reside on the farm I grew up on and raise beef cattle and hay, it is a Certified Tree Farm and in 2012 I placed the property in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation program. I have served on the Prince George's Agricultural Resources Advisory Committee since 2018 and am the Vice President of the Prince George's County Farm Bureau. I was asked by the Maryland Forest Service to serve on the Maryland Tree Farm Committee as the Southern Region Representative this year. I may add that I was a 2023 Leopold Conservation Finalist for the state of Maryland, and I am a retired U.S. Marine.


I became active with SMADC's mission by attending meetings they sponsored regards beef processing and sales. I have taken advantage of one of the programs they initiated, the "Freezer Trailer" program, which allows farmers to rent a freezer trailer to transport processed livestock to their farm or a retail establishment. Considering the distance a producer in Southern Maryland has to travel in transporting stock for processing and then back, these trailers fill a need. There are three trailers in Southern Maryland, and they are located in Calvert, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties. I rent a trailer two or three times a year and they are critical to my operation. I may add that a member of the SMADC Staff connected me with a retailer in Anne Arundel County that was looking for locally raised beef and he has purchased ten to twelve processed beeves from me every year since 2020. I look forward to the completion of the Regional Agricultural Center that will be located in Charlotte Hall and its support to the agricultural economy of Southern Maryland. Bottom line, SMADC plays a positive role in supporting agriculture and in protecting the soil and water in Southern Maryland.

I am in favor of the proposed increase in appropriation from \$900,000 to \$1,000,000, as it will provide the necessary resources for the Commission to expand its initiatives and contribute to the economic vitality of our region. Additionally, the repeal of the termination of certain provisions of law related to the annual budget bill appropriation is a positive step toward ensuring consistent and reliable funding for the Commission's ongoing activities.

I urge you to support SB 0589 to contribute to the sustained growth and prosperity of agriculture in Southern Maryland and statewide.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Daniel A. Donohue