

JACK BAILEY
Legislative District 29
Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Budget & Taxation Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Senate Bill 589 – Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland - Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission - Funding

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 589. This legislation would ensure permanent funding for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) in the State's budget.

In 2022, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 378 requiring \$900,000 from the Cigarette Restitution Fund to be appropriated to SMADC annually. However, this legislation will expire on June 30, 2025. SMADC is an important resource to farmers in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties, and I do not believe they should have to face uncertainty about the availability of the funding that their operations depend on every year. This legislation will repeal this sunset and ensure that these funding provisions remain in State law permanently.

In reviewing the scope of the support that SMADC has been offering the Southern Maryland agricultural community with the funding that they have received to date, I believe it is appropriate to increase the minimum support that the State gives SMADC to \$1 million annually. While I understand and respect the difficult fiscal situation that the State faces, we should maintain our commitment to assisting our farmers given the important role that agriculture plays in our economy, not only in Southern Maryland, but in the State as a whole.

Current law and this bill require this appropriation of funds to be from the State's Cigarette Restitution Fund. In 1999, State legislative leaders and the Southern Maryland Delegation agreed that a minimum of 5 percent of funds from the tobacco settlement should be allocated to assist Southern Maryland farmers, who had been dependent up to that point on growing tobacco, to transition to other agricultural pursuits. This commitment, however, has not been upheld by the State. This bill includes provisions drafted at the Commission's request to be consistent with this agreement, in order to recognize the original commitment that was made to our Southern Maryland farmers, even as the bill only requires the substantially smaller amount of \$1 million be appropriated to SMADC annually.

This bill passed the Senate 43-0 and is identical to House Bill 812, which you heard earlier this session. I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 589. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bailey", written in a cursive style.

Senator Jack Bailey