



Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 257 - Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund - Reporting
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 10, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council **supports SB 257 - Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund - Reporting**. This bill strengthens legislative oversight and transparency by requiring the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide detailed annual reporting on the use of funds credited to the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund. Specifically, SB 257 requires DNR to report on how fund revenues are used, the amount of agricultural land transfer tax proceeds distributed to the fund from woodland-only property transfers, and any uncertainties regarding those distributions.

The Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund plays an important role in supporting Maryland's forestry workforce and woodland stewardship efforts. Clear and consistent reporting ensures that funds intended to support forestry incentives and professional development programs are properly tracked, fully allocated, and used as intended. Increased transparency also helps policymakers identify funding gaps, resolve uncertainties, and make informed decisions that support long-term workforce and conservation goals.

Maryland's forestry industry is a vital component of the State's rural economy. A recent economic impact study by BEACON at Salisbury University, conducted with support from the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), found that forestry contributes more than \$4.1 billion to Maryland's economy, represents nearly 14% of resource-based industry activity, supports over 14,000 jobs statewide, and generates more than \$139 million in State and local tax revenue. Ensuring accountability in programs that support this industry is critical to maintaining its economic strength and sustainability.

As demand for forestry education, workforce development, and woodland incentive programs continues to grow, accurate reporting is essential to ensure that available resources are maximized and directed where they are most needed. SB 257 provides the General Assembly with the information necessary to evaluate program effectiveness and ensure that revenues dedicated to forestry initiatives are fully and appropriately utilized.

For these reasons, the Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 257.