



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

February 3, 2026

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Chair
Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 175:** Income Tax Credit – Venison Donation - Alterations

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark and Members of the Committee:

The high deer population in Howard County creates significant financial hardship for our farmers, presents public safety concerns, and negatively impacts our natural resources. House Bill 175 (HB175), by increasing tax credit benefits for donated deer meat, would further encourage deer harvesting, reduce overpopulation, and provide much-needed protein to nonprofit organizations. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Delegate Ziegler for her leadership in drafting House Bill 175 and for recognizing the importance of addressing deer overpopulation through practical and effective policy.

In March 2025, Howard County Recreation and Parks hired White Buffalo Inc. to conduct a deer population estimate survey on parkland. The survey results revealed that deer population densities on surveyed lands exceed commonly cited thresholds for ecological sustainability. Research indicates that forest regeneration is adversely affected when deer densities exceed 20 deer per square mile (Horsley et al. 2003), with some experts recommending densities below 16 deer per square mile for optimal ecosystem health (Waller and Alverson 1997). Current estimates for all surveyed lands demonstrate deer densities exceeding these benchmarks—by several fold in some areas. These findings underscore the urgent need for proactive management strategies to reduce deer densities, lessen human–deer conflicts, and support Howard County's long-term conservation and land management objectives.

Excessive deer density also results in substantial economic losses for Howard County farmers due to crop damage. Farming already operates on very thin profit margins, and many farmers simply cannot absorb these losses. If we are to preserve the proud tradition of farming in Howard County and Maryland, we must use every available tool to responsibly manage deer populations.

House Bill 175, by repealing the limitation on the maximum income tax credit for donations of deer meat to qualifying 501(c) organizations, offers a practical solution. It helps reduce deer populations, supports farmers, improves public safety, protects natural resources, and provides a valuable source of lean protein to nonprofit organizations serving those in need.

For these reasons, **I strongly support House Bill 175** and appreciate your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive