



**PRINCE GEORGE'S
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

5301 Marlboro Race Track Road, Ste. 100
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
Phone (301) 574-5162x3 ■ Fax 1-855-416-9660
www.pgscd.org ■ pgscd@co.pg.md.us

February 27, 2020

Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **House Bill 1146: Forest Conservation – Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund – Distribution of Agricultural Land Transfer Tax Revenue**

Position: **OPPOSED**

Dear Chairman Kaiser and Members of the Committee:


On behalf of the Board of Supervisor for the Prince George's Soil Conservation District, we are **OPPOSED** to House Bill 1146. The Agricultural Land Transfer Tax was instituted by State Legislature to preserve farmland. When a farm is sold and the land goes into a non-agricultural use, that tax is paid, and the funds go to preserve other farms.

Nearly every farm has some portion (usually a significant portion) of the farm that is in woodland, so appropriating funds from the operating budget of the nation's oldest and most successful ag-land preservation program (Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund - MALPF) to the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund is unreasoned. Essentially, when a farm is preserved, a significant area of woodland is also preserved. In fact, MALPF requires every property that has 25 acres or more of contiguous woodland to establish and maintain current forest management/stewardship plans for the property. This is a requirement prior to settlement.

The Governor has fully funded the MALPF program in this budget and the preservation of farms in Maryland is vital at a time when the agricultural community is struggling to survive. This bill would reduce the overall amount of Agricultural Transfer Tax available to MALPF by \$300,000 annually. If funds are diverted from the operating budget of MALPF it would severely restrict effective and efficient processing of applications and slow the preservation of vital farmland in Maryland and Prince George's County.

In addition, with every farm that is lost, the efforts to control and to improve storm water management becomes that much more difficult and costly to local and state governments. Agriculture is Maryland's number one industry, which is why preserving Maryland farms is vital for productive farmland, curbing development, protecting wildlife and enhancing the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Therefore, we ask that you please consider opposing House Bill 1146. Thank you for your consideration of this request, and please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,


FOR Steven E. Darcey, CPESC
Executive Director