



Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts

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House Bill 1146 - Forest Conservation - Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund - Distribution of Agricultural Land Transfer Tax Revenue

Committee: Ways & Means

February 27, 2020

MASCD Position: OPPOSED

The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) represents the 24 districts throughout the state of Maryland that spearhead the design and implementation of conservation practices in primarily agricultural but also urban and suburban landscapes.

Preserving farmland, woodland and natural landscapes is a priority of MASCD's. Farmland is the preferential land use for conservation of the Chesapeake Bay. Farmland provides the opportunity for natural filters and permeability for runoff. Most, if not all, MALPF easements also include a significant amount of woodland and any property with 25% or more land area of forest are required to have a Forest Management Plan.

This bill requires agricultural land transfer tax revenue from a broader subset of woodland transfers to be deposited in the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund (MNWIFF) and increases the maximum amount of that revenue, plus specified surcharge revenue, which may be deposited in the fund. In addition, while not having a net effect on overall special fund revenues, up to \$300,000 of special funds shift from the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund (MALPF) to MNWIFF.

MASCD is gravely concerned about the impact this may have on MALPF's ability to effectively operate. The MALPF program purchases agricultural easements on properties to preserve productive farmland and woodland for the continued production of food and fiber for all of Maryland's citizens. Program Open Space being fully funded means that MALPF has sufficient funding to return to an annual easement acquisition cycle which is positive for protecting more farm and woodland in Maryland. In order to meet the requirements for increased easement acquisitions, MALPF has increased staff through an MOU with Department of General Services.

Reducing MALPF operating funds by \$300,000 would likely result in terminating the recently created attorney and appraiser positions and therefore significantly increase the length of time it takes to close on easements and degrade the efficiency of the program.

MASCD respectfully asks for your unfavorable report on House Bill 1146.