



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: February 24, 2021

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 616

SHORT TITLE: Baltimore City - Soil Conservation District - Authority to Establish

MDA POSITION: Support

Senate Bill 616 would authorize the creation of a Soil Conservation District (SCD) in Baltimore City.

Maryland's existing 24 SCDs date back to the 1930's as a trusted, local provider of technical assistance for Maryland's farmers, developers and landowners. While agriculture has certainly changed since the establishment of SCDs, the mission of supporting conservation to protect our soils and water remains the same. To carry out this mission, SCDs rely on a partnership of federal, state, and local government to deliver programs, and provide staff and operating expenses.

The establishment of a new SCD in Baltimore City would address the unique and growing national and local interest in urban agriculture. The SCD will be the point of contact for Baltimore City farmers on soil erosion or stormwater issues and will help farmers manage the natural resources on their farm as part of a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP). Certified conservation planners and technicians will meet with farmers to evaluate the soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources on their property and offer several alternatives to address these resource conditions. SCD staff and farmers will collaborate to select and implement the best management practices (BMPs) that work best for these unique farm enterprises. These BMPs could range from installation of high tunnel systems for plant protection from extreme weather and growing season extension to pollinator habitat for nesting and nutrition of pollinators. Implementing a SCWQP will help not only protect the urban farm's natural resources, but contribute to the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture supports its establishment, and stands ready to coordinate with key partners to consider roles and funding contributions for a successful SCD.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at cassie.shirk@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.