



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

Senate Bill 616

Baltimore City – Soil Conservation District – Authority to Establish

Date: February 24, 2021	Position: Support
To: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee	From: Carmera Thomas-Wilhite Baltimore Program Manager

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 616 which establishes a Baltimore City Soil Conservation District to help conservation farming practices in urban agriculture.

A Baltimore City-based Soil Conservation District will provide technical assistance needed to further urban agriculture

Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) provide technical assistance and facilitate conservation funding for farming practices nationwide. SCDs gather local, state and federal agency staff in one office to provide resources to farmers, including conservation practices that protect water quality and prevent pollution runoff. Maryland currently has twenty-four SCDs, one for each County except Frederick County which has two, the Frederick and Catoctin soil conservation district.¹

Farming in Baltimore City consists of primarily urban agriculture which comes with a unique set of technical assistance challenges and funding needs. Many urban farms grow vegetables in “hoop houses,” which are greenhouses that extend the growing season. One of the limiting factors for Baltimore City farms is water, irrigation for their crops.

Funding for hoop houses, and technical assistance to overcome irrigation challenges could be provided by a Soil Conservation District office. For example, staff could assist urban farmers tap funding from the Federal USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for hoop houses. The State NRCS Conservation team provides \$100,000 annually to each SCD in Maryland through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to fund local farming projects.²

Urban agriculture creates green spaces and provide healthy produce to residents

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has worked with Baltimore City in the greening of abandoned lots. CBF supports conservation programs including urban farming that can preserve a green print within a developed area. Green space can help mitigate stormwater runoff into local waterways and the Bay. With this legislation, Baltimore City would have assistance through a District office to target urban farming practices

¹ Maryland Department of Agriculture, [Soil Conservation Districts](#), last visited 2.18.2021.

² United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), last visited 2.18.2021.

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to mitigate climate change, improve water quality, build healthy soils and reduce the amount of pollution in local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation also seeks to increase local food production and providing healthy food in food deserts. The current COVID pandemic has highlighted disparities and health risks associated with lack of access to nutritious food. CBF supports local food purchases through its Buy Fresh Buy Local Chesapeake program which helps consumers, sustainable farms, and businesses find each other and support efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 616. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.