



P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: SB 437 “Agriculture – University of Maryland Extension – Urban Farmer Assistance”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 9, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club recommends support for SB 437. This legislation will require the University of Maryland (UMD) Extension Program to hire two extension agents dedicated to urban farming and require that the budget submitted by the Governor include \$300,000 for the UMD Extension Program to fund these agents.

The agents hired under this act will be responsible for assisting urban farmers by three main methods:

- 1) The monitoring of urban farm production methods, the agribusiness management of such farms, and urban farm crop management
- 2) Providing educational outreach to urban farmers in Maryland teaching the skills necessary to establish and manage an economically viable and ecologically sustainable urban agricultural operation
- 3) Performing applied research within and throughout all urban farming facets of the UMD Extension Program

The practice of urban farming brings many environmental, economic, and social benefits to the communities that host such farms and to the areas that surround them, including an increase in air quality, the reduction of food transport costs, and the reduction of rainwater runoff. As the number of urban farms increases in Maryland, it is crucial that the UMD Extension Program be equipped with agents oriented to the principles of sustainable urban agriculture that characterize the UMD Extension Program and be able to apply current agroecological research to the everyday practices of urban farm management. SB 437 would ensure the employment of agents by the UMD Extension Program capable of fulfilling both of these requirements.

The interest in urban farming in Maryland is a testament to our state valuing the physical health of its people and environmental conservation of our lands. It is important that the UMD Extension Program be able to meet the needs of our urban farmers by having the annual budget necessary to hire agents focused on urban agriculture. We ask for a favorable report.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.