

January 21, 2022

Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
11 Bladen St. Annapolis, MD 21401

I am writing **IN STRONG SUPPORT** of your proposed bill, **Senate Bill 32**, to add Worcester County to the other counties in Maryland currently able to hold agritourist events, including weddings, in existing agricultural buildings up to 200 occupants without a change in occupancy and without requiring other building modifications.

I own Castle Farm, a horse breeding and sales barn in Snow Hill. We are agriculturally zoned and have a large horse barn. We obtained a special exception that allows us to hold events, such as weddings and corporate events on our property, but we have been unable to hold these events inside our 14,000 sqft building, even in inclement weather, where it would be safer for our guests to use the building rather than a tent.

Barns and farms are very popular wedding venue destinations across the whole country and Worcester County has not been able to compete fairly with the rest of the state since we have been unable to use our gorgeous agricultural buildings for supplemental income. This bill will help a generation of farmers to financially benefit from alternative uses of their agricultural property and help save our farmland from development while also providing an enormous economic benefit to other businesses in Worcester County. Most of our events are destination weddings, bringing clients and guests from other states and even other countries. Our average wedding is 100 - 150 guests and therefore, our economic impact on our community is significant. Castle Farm fosters other small business growth, including local restaurants, hotels, transportation, vendor, and our retail partners. We currently are only able to hold events when weather permits, in months of the year with mild weather. Passing Senate Bill 32 will allow couples to have more peace of mind to book our venue knowing they have an option to move the event inside in inclement weather and allow us to book events in early spring and late fall, which we have been avoiding due to an inconsistent climate. While most of the clients we attract are seeking an outdoor farm venue and love our tented events, being allowed to use our indoor arena as a venue location will help us tremendously in booking events.

We appreciate you very much. You are always accessible and responsive to your constituents. You have always been a staunch supporter of farmers and small business owners and it is noticed and valued. Thank you for sponsoring this bill.

Catherine Casto
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