

7 February 2022

Chairman Kumar P. Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Opposition for House Bill 0558
Land Use – Agrotourism – Definition

Dear Chairman Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of AIA Maryland and the nearly 2,000 Architects we represent, we ask for your vote opposing this bill as it is written, and we suggest that if camping is desired to be part of agrotourism, clarifications should be added to the definition of camping to diminish the potential health and life safety risk to participants and visitors to agrotourism sites.

As stewards of the built environment, architects are sworn to protect the health, safety and welfare of inhabitants of the structures we design or modify. As architects, we design meeting and assembly space to meet certain criteria of the building and life safety code, however when we design a space that may need to accommodate a sleeping person or persons, that space will have additional criteria in order to protect the people within it. We believe that this bill does not account for that possibility with the expanded camping definition added to agrotourism.

The definition of agrotourism is meant to enable the community to connect with, learn from and enjoy farm settings. This expanded definition enables structures to be used for education/entertainment etc., but all of the activities that were included in the definition prior to this legislation are active events when visitors/occupants would be awake and cognitively engaged. We have supported and we continue to support agrotourism and the use of farm structures for education and harvest related activities.

Our concern with adding camping or incidental outdoor stays to the permitted uses is that this definition is very general, and it may enable sleeping on the premises and inside existing buildings which were not likely designed in conformance with more restrictive aspect of the building code to help protect individuals who are sleeping. When an individual is sleeping, they may not be cognizant of a potential hazard, they are often a little groggy and slow to respond and they could be in an unfamiliar structure and not be aware of how to get out. While camping is generally considered outdoors, that is not defined in the proposed language, and we see the risk that individuals may consider sleeping in an agricultural building camping. Additionally, if foul weather may occur, and individuals are on the grounds camping in tents, they may choose to move to a structure to spend the night and such structure would not necessarily be equipped with equipment that may alert them to fire & smoke, provide adequate lighting to exits or protection for other hazards such as carbon monoxide poisoning. Additionally, it would be very unlikely that existing farm and agrotourism buildings would be equipped with sprinklers to help extinguish a fire if one started. Simply stated, allowing camping as currently defined in this proposed bill, may put individuals at risk if any of the scenarios we considered occur.

We understand that there are programs such as “Harvest Host” where individuals with a recreational vehicle or trailer may stay on a farm site for a weekend or an event, but these vehicles are fully self-contained with sleeping and toilet accommodations within them. Allowing camping of self-contained units or more specifically defining camping and

aspects of camping that are or are not allowed, would significantly diminish the potential risk of an incident that could take the lives of those who chose to occupy an agrotourism structure while camping.

AIA Maryland and its membership care deeply about Maryland's built environment and we support agrotourism, but we believe that the loose language of this expanded definition may put Maryland residents at risk, so AIA Maryland asks for your opposition to this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'C' and 'R' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Chris Parts, AIA
Director, Past President