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Dear Delegate Terrasa,

We write in opposition to HB 0387, “Pesticide Regulation – Transfer to Department of the Environment.” We strongly urge you to oppose this bill, that will have huge negative ramifications on Howard County and Maryland Agriculture sectors.

Agriculture is the largest commercial industry in Maryland and strong food systems are the foundation of our citizen’s quality of life. Farmers are stewards of the land, air and water that assures their farming enterprise will be successful. We are members of **Maryland Farm Bureau** and on the board of the **Howard County Farm Bureau**. Between the two of us we have a small farm in Highland, MD, and collectively we have 80 years of experience in farming, agriculture, pesticide teaching, research & extension, and agriculture regulatory and policy strategies.

We strongly oppose consolidation or transfer of Maryland Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) current programs, function, or authorities to any other department. We strongly support the transfer of ALL ag-related programs, functions and authorities from other departments to MDA.

We oppose HB 387 because:

- 1) MDA Understands Maryland Agriculture.** The MDA has long led Maryland agriculture, and has ample expertise in agriculture, including aquaculture, forestry, landscaping and other horticultural sectors. MDA has strong relationships with all involved in agriculture from farm to table, including farmers, foresters, landscapers, seafood harvesters, industry, food processors, consumers and beyond. Especially since battling pandemic challenges, MDA serves and works closely for every Marylander and understands each citizen’s support and concerns for local food systems. Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) lacks any expertise in these fields of agriculture, and it would take decades to build such competency.

Therefore, even the introduction of such a bill gives the appearance of shifting from a basis of facts, to a basis of fiction and fear. Farmers in Maryland are responsible stewards of the land, air and water, and they need to continue to have access to all tools needed to sustainably farm for the future.

- 2) MDA has the Regulatory Expertise.** The MDA has the expertise and experience and they conduct an effective and successful regulatory program for pesticides in Maryland, as well as in monitoring and mitigating plant diseases, controlling insects such as mosquitoes, and invasive weeds. Nothing is broken. MDA regulates pesticides regarding approval, distribution and handling of pesticides, according to U. S. EPA’s statute, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). MDA’s record of excellence and expertise would take decades to mimic in MDE.

- 3) MDA Competently Conducts Objective, Credible Risk – Benefit Assessments.** MDA, according to FIFRA, must conduct both a risk assessment and a benefits analysis on pesticides. MDE has no expertise or understanding of the benefits of pesticides to Agriculture, nor to other sectors that use pesticides. MDE has no expertise in plant diseases nor the huge devastating impacts these can have on agriculture. MDE does not have relationships with other departments nor with other state departments of agriculture to provide advice and counsel. MDE would not be able to effectively execute the risk- benefit assessment.
- 4) Makes No Sense.** Transferring a successful program from MDA to MDE makes no sense from the standpoint of efficiency of government. MDA has the budget, a successful program, the procedures in place and the expertise in amazing staff, who serve agriculture, and thereby all Marylanders.

What Does Make Sense...is that with your leadership, we continue to transfer all Agriculture programs, function and authorities to MDA.

This caught our eye and is close to our farm. It is our understanding that last year there were about 130 complaints made to MDA about pesticides; and that over half of those complaints were from a single person right here in our county, Howard County. Our best educated guess is that this person is not a farmer and s/he knows little about pesticide science, safe use, and regulatory programs. If this is true, it shows the type of extremism that can try to disrupt a strong state regulatory program such as at MDA, that provides such an essential function as feeding Marylanders.

Please don't let a small group of extremists with mis-informed and extreme opinions have such a negative impact on agriculture, the most important industry in Maryland.

Thank you for opposing this bill. Your leadership will benefit Agriculture and therefore a thriving Maryland Ag sector, to enhance the availability and accessibility of safe, affordable and nutritious food. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance.

Regards,

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