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RE: SB 866 - Special Vehicle Registration Plates - Chesapeake Bay Trust and Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation – Appropriation

Maryland General Assembly
Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee on Budget and Taxation,

As a former Trustee of the Chesapeake Bay Trust from 1999 to 2007 (8 years) and during that time served as the Chair in 2004, 2005, and 2006. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 866 with a revenue calculation amendment to benchmark the annual revenue managed by the Chesapeake Bay Trust (the “CBT”) and Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation (“MAEF”) to FY17-FY22 levels. In the unamended bill version, the revenues will undoubtedly decline over time. Senate Bill 866, with the amendment, ensures that the revenues managed by CBT and MAEF remain stable as additional background scene/commemorative vehicle license plates become available to vehicle owners in Maryland.

Both CBT and MAEF were established via government initiative, either statutorily by the General Assembly (CBT through SB 583/ Chapter 789 of 1985) or as a result of a Governor’s task force (MAEF). Neither entities were designed on a general fund appropriation model; rather, their important missions have been supported through private revenues generated by the now ubiquitous commemorative vehicle license plates and a source of pride in Maryland (the “Bay Plate” and the “Ag Tag”). These two license plates have been the only two commemorative plates in Maryland for 23 years, which has helped to keep these entities’ revenues stable. In States in which multiple specialty license plates have developed (like Florida, Virginia, Texas) the revenue shared by such entities is unstable and declining. As more background scene plates become available in any State, revenues generated by existing plates naturally decline, because there is a finite number of vehicles utilizing the license plates. The same is expected to occur in Maryland. If revenue managed by the Trust or MAEF were to decline, these non-profit entities, along with many others in your Districts, will be negatively and directly affected.

Both CBT and MAEF offer grant resources (and programming within MAEF) to support those on the front line in environmental stewardship and education efforts. CBT distributes the Bay Plate revenue through 400+ grants per year to engage Marylanders in the restoration of our State’s natural resources (from mountains to Coastal Bays, in every legislative District). Over 100,000 students and adults every year have experiences that connect them to nature as a result of these grants (along with real, measurable environmental improvement). Some grantee organizations’ project budgets are more than 50% derived from the distribution of CBT grant funding. MAEF provides grants, scholarships, and science-based programming to approximately 50,000 elementary students per year; professional development for teachers; and important support for agricultural education at secondary and post-secondary levels. Agriculture is the state’s largest commercial industry, and without the services provided by MAEF, our State will not have the next generation of individuals and leaders to support the agricultural industry.

For these reasons and more, I request a Favorable with the referenced Amendment reported on SB 866.

Sincerely,

Midgett S. Parker, Jr., Esq.