



**Senate Bill 866**  
**Special Vehicle Registration Plates - Chesapeake Bay Trust and Maryland**  
**Agricultural Education Foundation – Appropriation**

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**Date: March 7, 2023**

**Support with Amendment**

Submitted to: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Submitted by: Susanne Richards, Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc.

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**Summary**

Maryland’s two colorful commemorative license plates, the “Ag Tag” and the “Bay Plate,” have benefitted Maryland for more than two decades by providing revenue to support the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation (MAEF) and the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT). Revenues have remained stable for these organizations and their important work because only two commemorative plates have been available. In other states, when additional plates have been added, revenues for each plate have declined. SB866, with the amendments offered, would benchmark a minimum revenue level using general fund appropriations. If there is no loss in revenue, no appropriations would be required.

**Background**

The Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation was formed in 1989 at the recommendation of a Governor’s Task Force to support agricultural education and promote agricultural literacy. At the time, budget cuts had required elimination of positions and services in support of Agriculture Education at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). A group of private citizens and the agricultural industry fostered the foundation through its early years.

Maryland’s “Ag Tag” debuted in 2001, and the revenues from the tag greatly increased MAEF’s ability to grow its services to Maryland education. (In addition to the “Ag Tag” license plate revenues, MAEF is supported by private gifts, grants and program fees.)

Over the ensuing decades, MAEF has picked up roles and responsibilities which had traditionally been part of MSDE’s Office of Agriculture Education, including professional development training for Agriculture Teachers, management of the Career Student Technical Organization, Maryland FFA, and day-to-day duties within the Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources cluster.

In addition, MAEF operates a statewide Agricultural Literacy program, providing Mobile Science Lab programs to 50,000 elementary students annually and Mobile Agriculture Showcase exhibits to public events; offers professional development opportunities for all teachers to master using agriculture as a relevant context for teaching core subjects at any level; provides important connections, support and direction for Agriculture Education and Literacy programs statewide; offers two scholarship programs annually and provides grants for school and community gardens.

Upcoming changes to Maryland's educational system as a result of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future will greatly impact Agriculture Education. This pathway provides an important pipeline for individuals to prepare for careers in Maryland's largest commercial industry, which is responsible for 350,000 jobs and more than \$8.25 billion to Maryland's economy annually, generating more than \$755.2 million in state and local taxes.

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POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

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Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee on Budget and Taxation,

**The organizations listed below 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 Trust) and Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation (MAEF) to FY17-FY22 levels. In the unamended bill version, the revenues decline over time. SB866, with the amendment, ensures that the revenues managed by the Trust and MAEF remain stable as additional background scene/commemorative vehicle license plates become available to vehicle owners in Maryland in coming years.

Both the Trust and MAEF were established via government initiative, either statutorily by the General Assembly (the Trust, SB 583/ Chapter 789 of 1985) or as a result of a Governor's task force (MAEF). Neither were designed on a general fund appropriation model; rather, their important missions have been supported by private revenues generated by commemorative vehicle license plates now ubiquitous and a source of pride in Maryland (the "bay plate" and the "ag tag"). These two plates have been the only two commemorative plates in Maryland for 23 years, which has kept their revenues stable, unlike other states in which hundreds have developed over time (Florida, Virginia, Texas). As more background scene plates become available in any state, revenues generated by existing plates decline, because there is a finite number of vehicles. The same is expected to occur in Maryland.

If revenue managed by the Trust or MAEF were to decline, our organizations, along with many others in your districts, will be directly affected. Both the Trust and MAEF offer grant resources (and programming, for MAEF) to support groups like us.

The Trust distributes the bay plate revenue through 400 grants per year to engage Marylanders in the restoration of our 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 Trust.

MAEF provides grants, scholarships, and/or 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, we will not have the next generation of individuals to support the agricultural industry.

**For these reasons, we request a Favorable with Amendment report on SB 866.**

Sincerely,

Anacostia Watershed Society

Anne Arundel County Watershed Stewards Academy

Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Baltimore County Farm Bureau

Blue Water Baltimore

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Chesapeake Conservancy

Chesapeake Legal Alliance

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Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

London Towne Property Owners Association

Maryland Agriculture Teacher's Association

Maryland Coastal Bays Program

Maryland Conservation Council

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Maryland Farm Bureau

Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association

Montgomery County Farm Bureau

Nature Forward

NeighborSpace of Baltimore County

Phillips Wharf Environmental Center

Rock Creek Conservancy

Rural Maryland Council

Severn Riverkeeper

ShoreRivers

Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Sugarloaf Citizens Association

The 6<sup>th</sup> Branch