

KAREN LEWIS YOUNG
Legislative District 3
Frederick County

Committee on Education, Energy,
and the Environment



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 302
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3575 · 301-858-3575
800-492-7122 Ext. 3575
Karen.Young@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 1st, 2023

Support of SB 690 – Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg
Production - Prohibitions

The Honorable Brian Feldman

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Maryland Senate

11 Bladen Street, Room 302

Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Esteemed Members of the Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee:

SB690 prohibits the use of battery cages for all eggs sold and produced in Maryland. These extreme cages are so small that birds can't spread their wings. Each bird is given less than the space of an iPad on which to live their entire life. They're forced to eat, sleep, and defecate in the same space and are denied almost everything that is natural to them. These conditions are cruel to the animals and increase the spread of diseases such as salmonella.

The bill requires that eggs produced and sold in Maryland meet the cage-free standards established by the industry itself. The United Egg Producers' common sense guidelines on cage-free systems allow hens to perform important natural behaviors like flapping their wings, walking, perching, dustbathing, and laying eggs in nest boxes. Maryland's cage-free egg bill is based on these guidelines, and follows the same structure that has passed in ten states (California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Michigan, Massachusetts, Arizona, Utah, and Rhode Island) and has already been fully implemented in two (California and Massachusetts).

The question is no longer if the industry is going cage-free, but how to create a smooth transition for farmers and consumers while ensuring better animal welfare and food safety. More than 200 of the country's largest food companies have committed to switching to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply. This includes Burger King, Unilever, General Mills, Aramark, Costco, and Target. This is in addition to Maryland-based Sodexo and Marriott. This bill will keep Maryland farmers on track to meet demand while providing regulatory certainty and increasing access to

safer eggs for Maryland families. Small and family farmers with flocks of under 3,000 birds would be exempt from the new requirement.

Leading consumer advocacy organizations including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Center for Food Safety have supported cage-free reforms. Extensive research shows that locking hens in cages increases the risk of salmonella contamination. Salmonella is a bacteria that can be lethal, especially in children and the elderly. As of today, some companies charge an artificial premium to customers who are willing to pay more for eggs that meet heightened welfare and food safety standards. What this has done is create a two-tiered system in our state—higher income citizens can afford safer products for their families, while others have to settle for potentially-unsafe products. This premium will disappear once egg producers are held to the same basic criteria, providing people of all income levels with safer food.

Marylanders believe in compassion for all animals, not just pets. New polling numbers from YouGov show that seventy-six percent of Maryland voters support their legislators voting in favor of cage-free egg legislation like SB 690, while only 17 percent oppose. This support crossed party lines, with 84 percent of Democrats, 60 percent of Republicans and 71 percent of Independents in support of their legislator voting in favor of the proposal.

There is testimony from over 100 family farmers and 15 Maryland veterinarians calling for the passage of this legislation. Our farmers and veterinarians know first-hand the behavioral needs of egg-laying birds, and the cruelty of battery cages. Their support is testimony to the importance of this critical humane legislation.

We understand that the recent outbreak of Avian flu has shocked the industry and impacted egg prices. However, there is a built-in delay between the law taking effect and the producers needing to implement this legislation. That built-in delay provides time for farmers to manage the impact of the Avian flu and prepare for the new requirements. Maryland residents shouldn't have to wait to have guaranteed access to safer eggs.

The current spike in egg prices is due to Avian flu – and to retailers and producers using that situation to inflate egg prices even further and secure record profits. California's cage-free egg law, which mirrors Maryland's bill, went into effect over a year ago. According to an agribusiness industry source, it led to an increase in prices of less than a penny per egg.

Sincerely,



Senator Karen Lewis Young