



## **Testimony in Support of SB 158 Pesticide Regulation – PFAS Testing – Requirements**

**February 2, 2023**

**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**

**Submitted by: Virginia Ruiz, Marylanders for Food and Farm Worker Protection Coalition**

**Position: Favorable**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support SB 158, on behalf of Marylanders for Food & Farm Worker Protection (MFFWP). MFFWP is a broad diverse coalition of organizations and labor law experts that advocates to improve health and safety rights and protections for the poultry workers, crab pickers, and field workers in Maryland. If enacted, SB 158 will provide essential health and safety protections for vulnerable communities living and working in rural Maryland.

### **MFFWP testimony covers these key points:**

1. The burden of hazardous chemical exposure in recognized Environmental Justice communities is a public health and environmental issue. Both the overburdened and underserved need better protection from known and avoidable environmental and public health hazards.
2. Maryland's farmworkers, poultry, and seafood workers, predominantly people of color, are crucial members of our communities who we rely on for our food - yet they lack basic safety and health protections.
3. Food and farmworkers are already routinely exposed to high levels of pesticides in the fields where they work and in the communities where they live.
4. SB 158 is essential to prevent exposures to PFAS in the already overburdened rural communities who live and work on the front lines of pesticide applications.

Maryland is home to thousands of essential workers in the state's agricultural and food processing industries. Workers in these industries are predominantly from communities of color – most are either immigrants or from foreign countries here on temporary work visas. They work long hours in hazardous conditions for low wages. We rely on them to provide the meat, fruits and vegetables that are vital to our food supply and to Maryland's economy – including watermelons, tomatoes, crab meat and poultry. Maryland's farmworkers, poultry, and seafood workers are crucial members of our communities - yet this underserved population lacks basic safety and health protections.

- Agricultural pesticides pose great risks to human health and the environment, and food and farmworkers are routinely exposed to high levels of pesticides in the fields where they work, in disinfectants used in the food processing plants, and in worker housing. Pesticide exposure causes these workers to suffer more chemical-related injuries and illnesses than any other workforce in the nation. Each year, thousands of food and farmworkers experience the effects of acute pesticide poisoning, including headaches, nausea, shortness of breath, or seizures. Workers and their families have an increased risk for certain cancers and other diseases, which may be associated with pesticide exposure. Research shows

that children of workers who come into contact with pesticides are at higher risks of birth defects, childhood cancer and leukemia, for example. Despite these risks, Maryland's food and farmworkers often lack access to preventive care, medical assistance, health insurance and medical treatment.

The alarmingly high levels of PFAS found in pesticides commonly used in Maryland is concerning for all citizens, but especially for the already overburdened communities who live and work on the front lines of pesticide applications. Like pesticides, PFAS have been linked to acute and long-term adverse health impacts, including immune system failures, metabolic disorders, cancer, and fetal development issues. But there are no studies on the synergistic effects of combining these "forever chemicals" with pesticides. Exposure to PFAS-containing pesticides is an egregious added assault to a population that already suffers from significant inequity and lack of environmental justice. We must act quickly to stop any further harm to these overburdened communities from exposure to PFAS in pesticides.

SB 158 provides a commonsense approach to eliminate a recognized source of contamination, and reduces the cumulative impacts, effects, and exposure to PFAS in these sensitive communities and ensures safer food, air, and water for all. MFFWP urges you to support passage of SB 158 banning all sales and uses of PFAS-containing pesticides in Maryland. Thank you.