

March 30, 2023

**SB 866 - Special Vehicle Registration Plates - Chesapeake Bay Trust and Maryland
Agricultural Education Foundation – Appropriation
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

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 report on SB 866 as amended in the Senate.

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
ecoLatinos
Gunpowder Valley Conservancy
Friends of St Clements Bay
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
London Towne Property Owners Association
Maryland Agriculture Teachers Association
Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
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
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Sugarloaf Citizens Association
The 6th Branch