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February 8th , 2023

Senate Budget and Taxation & Education, Energy, and the Environment Committees

The Honorable Guy Guzzone and Brian Feldman

2 West Miller Senate Building

Annapolis, MD, 21401

Re: Senate Bill 310 – Natural Resources – Black Bear Conflict Reduction and Damage Reimbursement Fund - Uses

Dear Chairmans Guzzone, Feldman, and members of The Budget and Tax and E3 Committees,

Senate Bill 310 aims to support Maryland farmers while reducing their need to use lethal force against black bears. For context, Maryland has a *Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund*. The fund allows farmers to seek reimbursement after bears damage their property. Unfortunately, because of funding limitations the Fund cannot meet the annual requests it receives. The only other tool available to farmers is requesting a permit to shoot the bear that's damaging their property. 10 bears were killed in 2022 under these permits and should be noted that black bears repopulate slowly.

Senate Bill 310 does not change the availability of those permits, or impact bear hunting. It seeks to reduce the need for those permits by preventing property damage from bears before it occurs. Bears are an important component to our ecosystem for regulating habitats, and to our economy for tourism. The appropriations increase requested for this Fund is a worthwhile investment because it's preventative in nature. Not only does it reduce the likelihood of a bear being shot, but it also ensures the *Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund* is not overwhelmed when requests are submitted.

This bill is a win/win for both Marylanders and wildlife and is broadly supported by farmers, Maryland hunters, and environmental groups.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 310 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.