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Committee on Education, Energy,
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 23, 2024

Support of SB193 – Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg
Production - Prohibitions

The Honorable Brian Feldman

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Maryland Senate

Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and esteemed Members of this Committee:

It is my pleasure to speak with you today. My bill, Senate Bill 193, prohibits the use of battery cages for all eggs sold and produced in Maryland. It requires that eggs produced and sold in Maryland meet the cage-free standards established by the industry itself. Passing SB193 and ending the use of battery cages will prevent needless animal cruelty, decrease food contamination rates, and reduce price barriers for nutritious ingredients.

Battery cages are so-named because of how tightly they can be packed together. They are so small that birds cannot spread their wings. Each bird is given less than the space of an iPad on which to live their entire life. They are forced to eat, sleep, and defecate in the same space and are denied almost everything that is natural to them. These conditions are cruel and can increase the spread of diseases, like salmonella.

The industry's own United Egg Producers' common sense guidelines on cage-free systems allow hens to perform important, natural behaviors. My 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 five (California, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington).

Why is this bill important:

Safety

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. 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.

Affordability

My bill will eliminate the affordability gap for eggs that some families experience when accessing safe, healthy food by implementing one standard. One standard that establishes regulatory certainty and a fairer market for our farmers and Maryland families. Of course there are concerns that this could increase the cost of doing business. However, in California, for example, costs rose by less than a penny per egg.

Hundreds of companies have committed to switching to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply. This includes McDonald's, Costco, Target and Maryland's own Sodexo and Marriott. Small and family farmers with flocks of under 3,000 birds as well as birds used for their meat would be exempt from the new requirement.

Why now:

Maryland lags behind our peers and competitors on the national stage. With many states going cage-free, the question is how to help farmers navigate the transition. For that reason, my bill has an implementation date of 2026 in order to give farmers the time they need.

Moreover, Marylanders support going cage-free. Polling results from YouGov show that 76% of Marylanders are in favor of cage-free eggs. For the sake of millions of hens and the people we represent, it is time to catch up.

This bill will guarantee safer, more affordable, and more egg-uitable access for all Marylanders. I urge the committee to return a favorable report of SB193.

Sincerely,



Senator Karen Lewis Young