



January 23, 2024

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

SB0193

Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions

FAVORABLE

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Lorraine Docherty, US Philanthropy Manager at Compassion in World Farming. I represent myself, as a Maryland resident, Compassion in World Farming, and our Maryland supporters in strong support of SB0193. CIWF aims to transform our global food system to benefit farmers, animals, citizens, and the environment. SB0193 is crucial for four reasons:

1. Animal Welfare: Just like dogs, cats, and other animals, laying hens need exercise and must perform certain behaviors, like scratching, dustbathing, and nesting, for good health. Battery cages cause immense suffering, restricting natural behaviors and leading to frustration and health issues like feather loss and osteoporosis. In contrast, cage-free systems with enrichments as in SB0193, promote exercise, natural behaviors, and better overall health.

2. Industry Landscape: The industry is rapidly transitioning to cage-free due to consumer demand and ten existing state cage-free laws. Major retailers such as Target and Costco are committed to cage-free sourcing, and many businesses already source 100% cage-free eggs. Maryland needs to embrace cage-free systems to remain competitive in the evolving market.

3. Public Health: Chronic stress and lack of exercise in battery cages can suppress hens' immune systems, increasing the risk of spreading pathogens. Higher welfare systems, like cage-free, reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses and zoonotic diseases. This is critical in preventing Salmonella contamination, which causes significant illnesses and deaths, and preventing the emergence of new zoonotic diseases that could harm people and wildlife.

4. Market Opportunity: SB0193 creates a market opportunity for local and smallholder farmers. Cage-free requirements create a window for these farmers—who are often already cage-free or more able and motivated to transition—to fulfill retailer contracts previously held by large corporations who keep hens in cages, boosting Maryland's rural economy. Transitioning to cage-free systems poses minimal cost concerns for retailers and consumers, and CIWF is ready to assist in a smooth changeover.

Polling by the polling firm YouGov found strong support among Maryland voters for the cage-free egg legislation. Seventy-six percent of Maryland voters support cage-free egg legislation.

In conclusion, CIWF urges the committee to support SB0193 for a safer, more ethical future. Please see our written testimony for further details. Thank you for your consideration.