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House Bill 1165 - Stream and Watershed Restoration - Stream Restoration Contractor Licensing and Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Restoration and Funding (Whole Watershed Act)

Committee: Environment and Transportation

FOR INFORMATION

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA wishes to provide informational testimony on House Bill 1165 which would establish the Whole Watershed Fund to accelerate the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Coastal Bays. This fund will be administered by a state management team that will identify and prioritize projects to achieve rapid de-listing of impaired watersheds.

MGPA is supportive of targeting conservation practices to areas where they will have the greatest impact on improving water quality. In concept, MGPA is supportive of this bill and its overall intent.

MGPA would like to see the funding source for this bill not include the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund (MALPF) and a limit on funds that can be taken from the cost-sharing program established under § 5 8–702 of the Agriculture article. The purpose of the MALPF program is to purchase agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties. While MGPA appreciates and agrees that agriculture is the best land use for water quality and the Chesapeake Bay and that preserving agricultural land is in many ways a best management practice, MGPA would not support those funds being used for best management practice implementation instead of easement acquisition. The MALPF program is very successful and oversubscribed. Less than a third of the applications for MALPF easements are approved on an annual basis and diverting funds would only exacerbate that backlog.

The Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost Share Program referenced in § 5 8–702 of the Agriculture article is used to fund a wide variety of best management practices available to all Maryland farmers and landowners. MGPA would support ensuring that not all funds allocated to the MACS program are diverted to the Whole Watershed Fund so that funding from MACS is still available to farmers for other practices not in the targeted watersheds.

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