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**Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 234 – Department of Agriculture – Licensing,
Registration, Fees and Penalties, and Regulation**

Environment and Transportation Committee

February 7, 2024

Dear Chair Korman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF HB234**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

In addition to altering certain processes for licenses and penalties, House Bill 234 will alter the administrative penalty structure for certain violations related to nutrient management plans, increasing the minimum fine from \$100 to \$1,000 and eliminating incremental fine increases based on days past the violation. Compliance and enforcement are key to the success of nutrient management plans and they must be effective in order to meet our water quality goals. According to the MDA Nutrient Management Planning Producer Task Force Final Draft Report (2023), the Executive Summary states “The [Nutrient Management Plan] (NMP) program has been operating in the same way for over 20 years and there remains substantial non-compliance.”¹

Nutrient Management Plans are designed to protect water quality within the Chesapeake Bay. Given that the Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) Report indicated that agricultural and stormwater runoff should be primary focuses in the future for meeting water quality goals,² it is clearly time to update fees and penalties within the MDA.

Arundel Rivers works to partner with and reduce pollution from our agricultural communities within the West and Rhode River Watersheds, of which is over 10% agricultural. We support any initiatives that will result in more clean water compliance and downstream water quality improvements, and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE REPORT on HB234**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

¹ Maryland Department of Agriculture Nutrient Management Planning Producer Task Force: Final Draft Report. November 2023. https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/counties/MDANMPTaskForceFinalDraftReport15_Nov2023%20%282%29.pdf

² Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response Report. Chesapeake Bay Program: Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). May 2023.