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Environment and Transportation  
Committee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Children,  
Youth, and Families

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 14, 2024

To: The Honorable Marc A. Korman  
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Delegate Jen Terrasa  
District 13, Howard County

Re: Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB357 Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying  
Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions

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Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB357 which seeks to end the practice of confining egg laying hens in inhumane battery cages, which are generally only a few feet across and barely a foot and a half tall.

**The Problem:** The amount of room in these battery cages would already be insufficient for a single chicken, but often there could be as many as ten chickens stuffed into this narrow cage. This outdated form of containment is so cramped that it deprives hens of even the basic ability to spread their wings or engage in normal behavior. Hens prefer to lay their eggs in a private area, but they are denied this liberty when battery cages are in use. Being unable to move and function normally creates massive amounts of psychological stress for these birds which can manifest in self-pecking behavior and increased rates of osteoporosis. These side effects create a weakened hen that is still expected to produce the same number of eggs.

Additionally, it is in this very same space that hens are forced to both lay their eggs and defecate. The unsanitary nature of this practice increases salmonella risks for hens and consequently for egg consumers.

**The Solution:** HB357 states that Maryland farmers who own at least 3,000 egg-laying hens must transition to cage-free housing systems by January 1, 2026. Cage-free housing can be indoor or outdoor where:

- hens are free to roam unrestricted, and

- hens are provided the opportunity to exhibit natural behaviors using scratch areas, perches, nest boxes, and dust bathing areas.

The bill allows for farmers to install a variety of aviary options that fit the above requirements. HB357 is aimed at larger egg manufacturers and excludes broiler chickens and small farms with flocks below 3,000 hens. Estimates are that between five to eight growers produce 98.5% of Maryland's eggs. The bill has a limited target, but a wide scope of improvement. HB357 takes a balanced and science-based approach to end cruel treatment of hens while still allowing egg producers to operate successfully.

**Industry Trends:** Eleven states already ban the use of cages for egg-laying hens (Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington) and eight of those states ban the sale of eggs from cage facilities. Besides states, over 200 of the largest food corporations have already committed to using cage free eggs for their production supply including brands like McDonald's and Burger King. The continued low cost of these companies' menu items exemplify that cage free eggs do not create higher prices. Corporations and consumers alike agree that cage-free is the future of egg production.

**The Price of Eggs:** Some people have claimed that banning the use of battery cages will dramatically increase the price of eggs, but recent history shows that avian flu outbreaks are the primary cause of those price increases across the country. When implemented, HB357 will help decrease the high price of eggs in our state by reducing the premium that is charged for cage-free eggs. Egg sellers have been artificially inflating the prices of their cage-free products because they represent only a portion of all eggs on the market, making them a specialty item. HB357 would set cage-free as the new standard, thus deflating the premium being charged because cage-free egg production does not have any significant difference in production costs. This change would make eggs more accessible to Marylanders of all income levels with the added benefit of a safer product.

**Conclusion:** HB357 is essential for guaranteeing healthy hens and healthy egg consumers. It is time for Maryland to create a more humane egg industry and do its part to make cage-free eggs available and affordable for all citizens of Maryland.

I respectfully urge a favorable report.