

Bill: HB 357

Committee: House Environment and Transportation

Position: Support

Date: February 12, 2024

Chair Marc Korman, Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of our Maryland supporters, The Humane League (THL) supports HB 357, introduced by Delegate Jen Terrasa, which would require, after a phase-in period, that all eggs produced or sold within the state come from cage-free operations. This bill aligns with a growing trend seen in other states, enjoying bipartisan support for its commitment to improving the well-being of egg-laying hens. With industry-written standards and guidelines, HB 357 ensures a responsible transition to cage-free systems, allowing hens to engage in natural behaviors. Not only does HB 357 contribute to heightened animal welfare, but it also addresses critical concerns by reducing food safety risks associated with confined conditions. By keeping egg costs down, it makes safe and humane eggs accessible to all Marylanders. Supporting HB 357 is a crucial step toward fostering a more ethical and sustainable approach to egg production in Maryland. THL urges committee members to lend their support to HB 357.

## **Ensuring Safer, More Affordable, and Humane Egg Production for Marylanders**

Marylanders deserve eggs that are produced in a safer, more affordable, and humane manner. The growing public opposition to confining farm animals in extremely restrictive cages makes it evident that the future of egg production is moving towards cage-free systems. HB 357 would ensure that all eggs produced or sold in Maryland come from cage-free operations adhering to industry guidelines. This proposed bill aims to enhance food safety, promote animal welfare, and establish a business-friendly regulatory framework.

## **Bipartisan Support for Passing Similar Legislation**

Maryland's cage-free egg bill aligns with other states. Over the past several years, red, blue and purple states have passed similar measures, like California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Michigan, Massachusetts, and Arizona. Utah and Rhode Island have also passed cage-free egg standards. These measures all garnered strong bipartisan support.

## **Industry-Written Standards**

The industry-written standards outlined in HB 357 for cage-free systems mandate at least 1 square foot for birds in aviary-style facilities and at least 1.5 square feet for birds in floor systems. This legislation would enable Maryland's more than 2 million egg-laying hens to engage in important natural behaviors such as flapping their wings, walking, perching, dustbathing, and laying eggs in nest boxes, aligning with guidelines from the United Egg Producers.

## **Reduction of Food Safety Risks**

HB 357 not only increases animal welfare but also reduces food safety risks. The confinement of millions of hens in the United States egg industry in small, barren cages has been associated with higher rates of salmonella. Cage-free systems, as evidence indicates, can help mitigate these risks.

## **Keeps Costs Down**

Moreover, the focus of this bill solely on eggs keeps costs down and does not impact other sectors of animal agriculture. The production cost differential between cage and cage-free housing systems is minimal, estimated to be less than a couple of pennies per egg. As cage-free eggs become more commonplace, retail markup is expected to decline, presenting consumers with affordable options.

## **Commercial Egg-Buyers Have Already Transitioned to Cage-Free Eggs**

The demand for change is evident among commercial egg-buyers, with major companies like Target, Costco, McDonald's, Burger King, and many others already using or transitioning to 100% cage-free eggs. The deadline for implementing HB 357 is January 1, 2026 and nearly all of these companies will have gone cage-free by that date.