



Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management

March 6, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman, Chair
The Honorable Regina Boyce, Vice-Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB812- Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland- Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission- Funding

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

The Maryland Forests Association (MFA) supports the passage of HB812

Maryland Forests Association, Inc. (MFA) is a non-profit 501 c(3) membership-driven organization established in 1976. We represent the entire forest community statewide. Our membership encompasses people that live, work, and play in the forest. MFA envisions a future in which vibrant forests are maintained throughout the State, providing diverse economic and environmental benefits to all. The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission is vital to supporting local tree farmers, promoting forestry education, and promoting sustainable practices.

It is important to note that this is not new funding they are seeking. Current existing funding comes into the State every year from the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF), of which 5% was promised to SMADC twenty years ago upon their creation during the Tobacco Buyout. Despite what was written then, SMADC has consistently gotten less than that and has been existing off only \$900,000 yearly from that fund.

This bill asks that SMADC receive at least \$1 million annually, or up to the original 5% of the CRF as promised, in perpetuity.

The CRF fund is continual and non-lapsing, and the only place that money can go is to the Maryland Department of Health or to SMADC. The Health Department gets over \$30 million annually from this fund alone, plus their additional funding. SMADC requests their fair share of the CRF so they can continue supporting the farmers in their region and across the State who are growing healthy food, sustainable fiber, and a healthy community.

The proposed increase in funding to at least \$1,000,000 is essential for the following reasons:

Supporting Agricultural Innovation: The additional funds will enable the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission to invest in innovative initiatives that benefit local farmers, promote sustainable practices, and enhance agricultural productivity.

Economic Impact: Agriculture and Forestry are cornerstones of the local economy, and increased funding will positively impact the financial well-being of our farmers, contributing to the economic vitality of Southern Maryland.

Educational Programs: The Commission plays a vital role in educating the community about the importance of agriculture. The increased funding will allow for expanded educational programs, ensuring residents are informed about the value of sustainable practices.

It is worth noting that last fiscal year, with just their \$900,000 in base funding, SMADC was able to leverage that to bring in over \$3 million additional dollars in grants.

SMADC and the farmers they serve are a proven worthwhile return on investment. Over the past several years, they have assisted our organization with educational projects, tours, and literature that have all led to a better understanding of the forestry sector.

I am in favor of the proposed increase in appropriation from \$900,000 to \$1,000,000, as it will provide the necessary resources for the Commission to expand its initiatives and contribute to the economic vitality of our region. Additionally, the repeal of the termination of certain provisions of law related to the annual budget bill appropriation is a positive step toward ensuring consistent and reliable funding for the Commission's ongoing activities.

I urge you to support HB812 to contribute to the sustained growth and prosperity of forestry in Southern Maryland and statewide.

In closing, our organization relies heavily on regional partners as part of our education and outreach projects that keep our forests healthy and productive. Our partnership has a proven track record. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB812. Thank you, and please feel free to contact me, Beth Hill, at 410-463-1755 or via email at beth@mdforests.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "E. Hill".

Elizabeth D. Hill
Executive Director
Maryland Forests Association