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Date: February 12, 2024
To: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Transportation
From: Holly Porter, Executive Director
Re: HB 357 – Prohibiting Confinement of Egg Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - **OPPOSE**

Delmarva Chicken Association (DCA) the 1,600-member trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, processing companies, and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and Delaware opposes HB 357 and urges an unfavorable committee report.

HB 357 would prohibit the widespread and standard industry use of battery cages in egg-laying operations.

To be clear, the Delmarva Chicken Association represents the broiler (meat) chicken industry alone and does not normally advocate on behalf of other poultry or egg-layers. However, we do represent allied business members who supply and serve egg-laying operations as well as the broiler industry. In addition, as an agricultural association, we advocate for policies that are beneficial to Maryland agriculture as a whole and oppose those which would be detrimental.

Except for purposes of transportation, our chickens have never been, and will never be in cages. However, this is what logistically works best for our industry. As you will hear from others, their needs are different from ours. However, as an agricultural association, we take exception to any policies which are not economically sound or based on scientifically proven research. We have heard from at least one producer that if this legislation is passed, it will force them to close their family business. Some estimates show that implementing these rules could raise production costs by 40% and would require a 119% increase in labor.¹ Legislation which harms a farmer's well-being and runs contrary to fine-tuned, widespread, and generally accepted agricultural practices sets a dangerous precedent for the entire agricultural economy and community.

This legislation is also detrimental to both the livestock and the consumer. Analyses have shown that implementing this law could cause as much as a 35% reduction in egg supply, and a 22% increase in the retail price of eggs.² This is compounded by the persistently inflated price of eggs in the United States. Furthermore, studies from the European Union (where cage-free is now mandated) have demonstrated significantly higher rates of infectious diseases among poultry.³ This is particularly concerning for our industry, as High Path Avian Influenza still poses the most significant threat to our economic well-being and animal welfare.

¹ [Economic and market issues on the sustainability of egg production in the United States: Analysis of alternative production systems - ScienceDirect](#)

² [Understanding the Pores of a Soilless Substrate \(purdue.edu\)](#)

³ [Infectious diseases in free-range compared to conventional poultry production - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)



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Again, while we do not use cages in the broiler industry, we think it is very concerning when legislation is considered which gives more credence to objective beliefs about what is best for the animal than it does sound science and economic viability.

For these reasons we urge an **unfavorable** vote on HB 357.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at porter@dcachicken.com or 302-222-4069 or Grayson Middleton at middleton@dcachicken.com or 410-490-3329.

Sincerely,

Holly Porter
Executive Director