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Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB81 “Real Property – Condemnation – Compensation for Farm and Agricultural Property  
(Protect Maryland Farm Lands Act)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 23, 2025

Valleys Planning Council, a non-profit that conserves land and resources, preserves historic character and maintains the rural feel and land uses in northwestern Baltimore County, urges a favorable report on HB81, which would value certain agricultural property taken in a condemnation proceeding to be valued at 350% of the highest appraisal value.

Today there are more than 1.9 million acres of farmland in Maryland. Fifty years ago, there were 2.95 million acres of farmland. Agricultural land is lost mostly to development. Development pressures on agricultural land are only increasing. Once agricultural land is converted to another use, it is lost forever.

Maryland cannot afford to lose agricultural land. Agriculture is the largest commercial industry in Maryland, employing hundreds of thousands of people. In FY 2023, Maryland agriculture generated more than \$3.3 billion in cash receipts for farmers.<sup>1</sup> Additional impact was provided by related jobs and services.

Under the best circumstances, farming is a difficult job, with narrow margins requiring that every dollar be squeezed out of every acre. Taking agricultural land through condemnation may result in entire farms becoming unviable. Landowners should be compensated for losing land that may mean the difference between making a profit and losing money, or losing the farm entirely.

Being required to pay such a high price for agricultural land will ensure that anyone using eminent domain to take that land “for a greater good” will consider other alternatives that are less detrimental to the largest commercial industry in Maryland, one that provides many jobs and feeds many Marylanders. Valleys Planning Council recommends a favorable report on HB81.

Respectfully,

Renée Hamidi, Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> [Maryland Department of Agriculture FY2023 Annual Report](#)