

Written Testimony on SB806: Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Robert Szabo

Date: February 25, 2025

Subject: Vote YES on SB806

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and respected Committee Members,

My name is Robert Szabo, I am a Maryland resident living in District 18, in Montgomery County. I am submitting this testimony to express my support for SB806, which seeks to prohibit the Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production.

This legislation will ban the use of cages to confine egg-laying hens in commercial egg operations. The modern practice of caging hens started after World War II when farmers looked for ways to make their operations more efficient and profitable, as part of a broader movement toward industrialization of agriculture in the second half of the 20th century. Large-scale operations found that by confining hens into the smallest space possible, they could maximize their output of eggs. These efficiencies, however, came at the direct cost of animals' welfare.

Today, the average layer chicken has 67 square inches of cage space, according to Humane World for Animals, which is less than a standard sheet of paper. Not only are these hens not able to engage in normal behaviors like running, digging in the dirt, or socializing with the flock, but many cannot even stand up or stretch their wings in these conditions. Confinement leads to psychological and physical traumas including foot disorders, overgrown claws, and bone disease. Layer chickens are already calcium-deficient from constant egg production and at risk for osteoporosis, and this risk is greatly increased when they are caged with no opportunity to exercise. I would encourage members of the committee to look for images and video evidence of the treatment of chickens in Maryland egg operations if they do not yet see the harms of the system.

Mandating cage-free operations is a small but necessary step to address the animal welfare problems in our food industry. Eleven states have already passed legislation

banning confinement of egg-laying chickens, and dozens of major US restaurants and retailers have already committed to only sourcing cage-free. Given how harmful caging is to chickens, I was shocked to learn that Maryland has not acted on this issue. We should be a part of this new policy direction, and encourage our Maryland farmers to follow the market change as more consumers insist on humane treatment of farm animals. For these reasons, I would strongly encourage the committee to vote in favor of SB806.

Sincerely,

Robert Szabo,

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