



Maryland Farm Bureau

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February 14, 2025

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: Support of SB563 - Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act)

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in favor of SB563 Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act). This legislation would establish the Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund to advance agricultural fairs and education in the State.

Agricultural education plays a crucial role in shaping the next generation of leaders, farmers, and informed consumers. Programs such as 4-H, FFA, and agricultural education in schools provide hands-on learning experiences that connect students to the agricultural industry while also teaching them valuable life skills. Through participation in these programs, young people develop leadership abilities, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and strong work ethic—qualities that benefit them regardless of their career paths. Additionally, agricultural education fosters a deeper appreciation for the role of farming in our economy, food supply, and environmental sustainability, helping to build a well-informed citizenry that supports and understands agriculture's significance.

Currently, the Maryland Agricultural Fair Board, the Maryland State Fair, and the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation depend on funding from a non-lapsing special fund, which has traditionally been sustained by unclaimed racing mutuals. These funds have been instrumental in supporting agricultural fairs, youth programs, and hands-on educational experiences that inspire and educate the next generation. However, with the rapid expansion of online gambling, the revenue generated from unclaimed racing mutuals has dwindled, resulting in a significant shortfall in available funding. Consequently, many programs that rely on these funds to operate effectively have seen reductions in resources, limiting their ability to provide opportunities for students and communities.

Ensuring the continued success of agricultural education programs is essential not only for the students who directly benefit but also for the broader agricultural industry and local economies. These programs contribute to workforce development, fostering a pipeline of skilled individuals who will drive innovation and sustainability in agriculture. Without adequate funding, access to agricultural education and hands-on learning experiences will decline, potentially leading to long-term consequences for industry and rural communities. To maintain and expand these critical programs, alternative funding solutions must be explored, and policymakers must prioritize investment in agricultural education. Supporting these initiatives is

not just about preserving tradition, it is about securing a strong future for Maryland's agricultural sector and ensuring that young people have the knowledge and skills to succeed in an ever-changing world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough", is positioned below a horizontal line.

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please reach out to Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions