



January 24, 2025

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chairman
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Senate Bill 176 – Agriculture - Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan - Uses of Information

Position: **Informational**

Chairman Feldman & Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) I am providing **information** regarding the use of information by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) from a soil conservation and water quality plan provided by a soil conservation district. MASCD, incorporated in 1956, promotes practical and effective soil, water, and natural resource related programs to all Marylanders. Through individual conservation districts MASCD provides leadership, education, cooperation, and local direction, on a voluntary basis.

Maryland's soil conservation districts work with farmers, connecting conservation goals with resource needs to establish best management practices for the stewardship of their land. In 2024, MASCD wrote or updated 1,317 soil conservation and water quality plans to protect over 130,000 acres. In addition to supporting farmers, local soil conservation districts work closely with the state through its departments. Soil Conservation Districts (SCD) offer compliance assistance on Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) Sediment, Stormwater and Dam Safety Program; support on MDA's Field Assessment Team to meet Chesapeake Bay Watershed Best Management Practice Implementation Goals; and more. Currently, a soil conservation and water quality plan disseminated by a SCD supervisor can be utilized by the Department of the Environment for its statistical purposes and enforcement action, although the same data cannot be used by the Department of Agriculture for its enforcement actions. SB 176 would update the permissible use of the data of the information to include enforcement actions of the Department of Agriculture. MASCD and Maryland's soil conservation districts work closely with MDA and will support the department to carry out their mission.

MASCD contains thousands of success stories ranging from innovative conservation techniques to waterway management. Conservation districts are locally led to address soil and water issues at the district level while also connecting their farmers and residents to resources at the state and federal level. Our shared success is the result of a network of partners established through a fair and just process in which the agricultural communities throughout the State are appointed and serve the common goal of their communities. A unified future for agriculture in the State of Maryland has proven to be effective when we can work together.

Thank you for your kind consideration and attention to this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jen Nelson, Executive Director
Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts