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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 563 – Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment
(Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act)
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 18, 2025

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 563 – Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act). This bill establishes the Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund aimed at advancing agricultural fairs and education in the state. It requires that any interest earnings from the fund be credited back to it. Additionally, the bill allocates \$1,450,000 from the state lottery proceeds—before any funds are directed to the General Fund—to the Promise Fund. Lastly, it repeals the previous requirement that a specific amount of annual proceeds from the state horse racing special fund be used to promote agricultural fairs and education in the state.

Maryland's agricultural education and agricultural fairs play a vital role in the state's economy and community engagement.

Agricultural education in Maryland provides essential knowledge and skills to students and individuals interested in pursuing careers in agriculture, environmental science, and related fields. By teaching sustainable farming practices, animal husbandry, and the basics of agribusiness, these educational programs help cultivate the next generation of agricultural leaders. This education not only supports local farming communities but also ensures the continuation of agricultural traditions and innovations that are critical for food security and economic stability in Maryland.

Maryland agricultural fairs are also important for several reasons. These fairs serve as a platform to showcase local produce, livestock, and agricultural products, allowing farmers to connect directly with consumers. This strengthens the local economy by promoting the sale of Maryland-grown food and crafts. Additionally, fairs create a sense of community, bringing people together to celebrate the state's agricultural heritage through events like livestock shows, exhibits, and competitions.

Moreover, agricultural fairs often include educational components, such as workshops and demonstrations that inform participants about agriculture, sustainability, and food systems. These events foster an appreciation for farming and the challenges that farmers face, bridging the gap between urban and rural communities.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 563.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic, or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”