



Senate Bill 563
Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund

Date: February 14, 2025

Favorable

Submitted to: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Submitted by: Susanne Richards, Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB0563. My name is Susanne Richards and I am the Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation.

MAEF is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting agricultural education and agricultural literacy, which in turn benefits the agricultural community in Maryland.

MAEF programs serve K-12 and post-secondary audiences, providing:

- hands-on science instruction to 50,000 elementary students annually through our Mobile Science Labs,
- professional development for teachers at all grade levels,
- agricultural information to the public through our Mobile Showcases,
- support and administration of Maryland FFA for career and leadership development of our agriculture students,
- grants for school and community gardens,
- scholarships,
- support for Maryland agriculture teachers in secondary schools, and more.

Our programs benefit more than 150,000 people directly each year.

For many years, MAEF had been able to count on \$75,000 in funding through the Special Fund statute, using it to supplement revenues from the Ag Tag license plate

to support programming. As the use of digital gambling technology increased, the funding decreased and our ability to support programming has been impacted.

In addition, our local fairs and shows have benefitted from the Special Fund. More than a million Marylanders compete in and visit our fairs and community shows each year, which provide important **nonformal** education to our communities and economic boosts to local economies.

While the number of people actively engaged in farming is relatively small, it is now growing, thanks to renewed interest and an increasing number of smaller urban and suburban farms. Whether farm or “farmette,” there is a shared need for educational resources

- to support these businesses,
- to ensure a thriving and safe local food supply,
- to and effectively steward our rural land, water and air.

Agriculture is the state’s largest commercial industry, part of a resource-based economy with an economic impact of \$20.2 billion each year, supporting more than 88,600 Maryland jobs and generating nearly \$755.2 million in state and local businesses. It is an economic powerhouse that fuels our rural communities and the state’s economy.

It is an industry that represents the very foundation this state since its beginning and continues to sustain it generations later.

We urge your favorable vote for SB563. Thank you.

Susanne Richards

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