

25 MGPA_SB736 Wildlife Fund.pdf

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Position: FAV



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Date: March 4, 2025

Senate Bill 736 - Natural Resources - Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund - Establishment

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports Senate Bill 736 which would establish the Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund.

Previous estimated from the National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates that farmers experience over \$10 million in crop damage annually with 77% of that being attributed to deer. MGPA members experience would say that number is likely much higher. Maryland's deer population was estimated to be just over 200,000 white-tailed deer and 10,000 sika deer in 2022. The density of deer to suitable habitat in Maryland is high and therefore causes conflict with not only farmers and their crops but also vehicles and homeowners.

This fund would not only provide reimbursement for damage under certain circumstances but also grants for practices that seek to avoid crop damage from wildlife.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable report on Senate Bill 637.

MDFB - Support - SB736 Natural Resources - Wildlif

Uploaded by: Tyler Hough

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau

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March 4, 2025

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of SB736 Natural Resources - Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund - Establishment**

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in support of SB736 Natural Resources - Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund – Establishment. This bill establishes the Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund to reimburse a person for damage caused by deer, geese, and other wildlife to crops and other agricultural products

Wildlife damage is a major problem facing our Maryland Farmers. In the last time that the USDA surveyed Maryland farmers regarding crop damage, deer were responsible for roughly 77 percent and geese were responsible for roughly 11 percent. Based on discussions with farmers statewide, it is estimated that average deer damage costs the farmer roughly \$50 per acre. Considering that Maryland has more than 1.2 million crop acres, deer could be causing as much as \$60 million in damage yearly.

This legislation marks a major advancement in tackling the problem of wildlife-related damage within our state. By establishing a non-lapsing fund specifically dedicated to providing relief for agricultural losses and crop damage caused by wildlife, the law demonstrates a proactive and collaborative effort between the Department of Natural Resources and the agricultural community.

The proposed grant program serves a dual purpose. First, it offers financial reimbursement to farmers who have suffered losses due to wildlife, helping to alleviate the economic burden they face. Second, it encourages farmers to participate in the program by providing funding opportunities for projects designed to prevent future wildlife damage. This approach not only supports affected farmers in recovering from losses but also promotes long-term strategies to mitigate wildlife-related risks, fostering a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector.

Maryland Farm Bureau Supports SB736

Tyler Hough

Director of Government Relations

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

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Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: UNF



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

March 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 736 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: OPPOSE

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department opposes SB 736 because it creates a mandatory program to reimburse landowners for wildlife damage, and to award grants related to preventing wildlife damage, but it does not provide for an adequate or reliable funding source. It also requires the Department to devote staffing to investigate all damage claims to confirm the damage was caused by wildlife. The Department currently does not have the staff or dedicated funding available to fill these roles.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department currently has a compensation program for black bear damage that, since 2015, has sold a total of 585 black bear conservation stamps at a cost of \$5.00 each. When combined with donations, the black bear fund in recent years has generated, on average, less than \$3,000 annually to distribute to farmers claiming crop damage from bears. As a result, only a very small percentage of each bear damage claim submitted is reimbursed, and farmers are left unsatisfied with the program. This issue would be significantly inflated for the proposed SB 736 program, given damage attributed to deer and other wildlife is much greater than damage from bears in Western Maryland.

It is estimated that deer, geese, and other wildlife covered by this bill cause over \$10 million in damage annually in Maryland. A Deer Conservation Stamp and related donations would likely generate less than \$7,500 annually for the Department to put towards the damage fund. Even if \$50,000 of dedicated funding were secured through the budget process, the amount would be a magnitude less than what is needed and expected for adequate funding.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 736 requires the Department to create a Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund. Money from this fund would be used to pay for wildlife damage claims and to award grants to individuals or groups that would seek to prevent wildlife damage.