



**Bill:** HB 834, Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions

**Committee:** Environment and Transportation Committee

**Position:** Support

**Date:** February 17, 2025

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of our Maryland supporters, Legal Impact for Chickens supports HB 0834. Eliminating battery cages, requiring minimum amounts of space, and requiring enrichments that allow hens to exhibit natural behaviors, will all benefit both egg-laying hens and the public health. We encourage Maryland to join Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington in passing a cage-free egg law.

Hens who are kept in battery cages in the United States typically each have less floor space than a sheet of paper.<sup>1</sup> They do not have enough space to do such natural behaviors as turning, cleaning themselves, or stretching their wings.<sup>2</sup> Hens who live in cage-free housing systems experience significantly less pain than birds kept in battery cages, due to the fact that they can move around, nest, and roost.<sup>3</sup> Providing hens with more space and enrichments also minimizes the risk of the hens pecking at each other, which is more common when the birds are stressed and confined.<sup>4</sup>

Increasing the amount of space that birds have on farms is also good for public health. When birds live in higher-welfare conditions, they can better fight off infections that could be passed on to humans. For example, stress caused by overcrowding on the farm increases birds' susceptibility to *Salmonella*.<sup>5</sup> In 2019, the European Food Safety Authority stated, "There is

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<sup>1</sup> *Cage-Free vs. Battery-Cage Eggs*, Humane World for Animals (last visited Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.humaneworld.org/en/issue/cage-free-vs-battery-cage-eggs>.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Ritchie, *Do Better Cages or Cage-Free Environments Really Improve the Lives of Hens?*, Our World in Data (Sept. 25, 2023), <https://ourworldindata.org/do-better-cages-or-cage-free-environments-really-improve-the-lives-of-hens>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

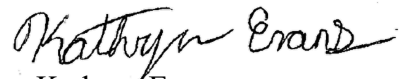
<sup>4</sup> Megan Lighty, Kayla Niel, & Phillip Clauer, *Poultry Cannibalism: Prevention and Treatment*, PennState Extension (Mar. 31, 2023), <https://extension.psu.edu/poultry-cannibalism-prevention-and-treatment>.

<sup>5</sup> European Food Safety Authority Panel on Biological Hazards et al., *Salmonella Control in Poultry Flocks and Its Public Health Impact*, 17 EFSA J. 5596, at 57 (2019); A.V.S. Gomes et al., *Overcrowding Stress Decreases*

conclusive evidence that an increased stocking density . . . and stress-inducing conditions result in increased occurrence, persistence and spread of *Salmonella* in laying hen flocks.”<sup>6</sup>

Legal Impact for Chickens therefore supports HB 0834, for the hens and the humans of Maryland. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Evans  
Staff Attorney  
Legal Impact for Chickens

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*Macrophage Activity and Increases Salmonella Enteritidis Invasion in Broiler Chickens*, 43 Avian Pathology 82 (2014).

<sup>6</sup> European Food Safety Authority, *supra* note 5, at 4, 56–57.