



TESTIMONY FOR HB0834 AGRICULTURE - CONFINEMENT OF EGG-LAYING HENS IN COMMERCIAL EGG PRODUCTION - PROHIBITIONS

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Terrasa

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0834 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

The Eastern Shore is home to some of the most extensive chicken farming operations in the nation. Air quality issues and asthma rates are soaring from the toxic chemicals that have permeated the air around these large chicken operations. The chickens also suffer. Caged chickens are usually kept battery cages their entire productive life; they can barely stand up, cannot spread their wings, and are denied natural behaviors like roosting, nesting, perching and bathing. They are fed antibiotics to control the spread of disease.

This legislation, if enacted, would require a cage-free housing system for chickens starting in 2030. The system would require more than one square foot of usable space for each chicken and allow them access to the outdoors. It would also require the chicken farmer to obtain a certificate from the Maryland Department of Agriculture that states that they are providing a cage-free environment for their chickens in order to sell the chicken eggs. Without the certificate, they will not be able to sell the eggs. If they are found to have violated these requirements, they would be subject to a civil fine that escalates from \$500 for a first violation to \$2,000 for each violation after the third violation.

Given the bird flu and all of the other issues surrounding the confinement of chickens, we believe this is not only necessary, but it needs to be done immediately. We recommend that the cage-free housing is available by the end of the year. We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report in committee.