



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HB1511
(NATURAL RESOURCES - WILDLIFE DAMAGE PREVENTION AND REIMBURSEMENT FUND -
ESTABLISHMENT)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
March 12, 2025

As long as I've been on this committee, I've heard about the damage that deer cause to Maryland's farms. Over and over again I've heard the anger and frustration from farmers who dedicate their lives to their trade only to see significant financial losses when deer eat their crops. As we heard in the State of Agriculture briefing earlier this session, some farms have suffered such extensive damage from deer that they've gone out of business, causing a loss of agricultural land. Almost [all](#) of Maryland's farms are affected by this epidemic with it accounting for a roughly 15-20% loss in agricultural output, resulting in tens of millions of dollars in damage for farmers across our state.

This bill seeks to ameliorate this problem by establishing a fund to reimburse Maryland farmers up to \$5,000 (depending on the damage assessments) for damage caused by wildlife like deer and geese. . It would not only reimburse for damage already caused, but would also prioritize those who utilize prevention measures recommended by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Present examples of prevention measures for [geese](#) include permits being issued to control and destroy nests and eggs, and for white-tailed [deer](#) there are special electric fences, vegetation management efforts, repellants, and more general population control measures like hunting permits, including coverage for the [USDA's Sharpshooter Program](#). This legislation would allow the fund to issue funding and/or reimbursements to landowners to cover the cost for these prevention measures, as well as to help with the cost of the damage.

Not only does this bill seek to help farmers that have already been affected by wildlife damage, but also to prevent future damage via current prevention measures being built and the education efforts for other farmers and the knowledge that this fund exists to fund future prevention projects.

This bill would duplicate an already existing program to cover charges related to bear damage on agriculture, which includes prevention efforts as well as the existing crop damage caused by

bears. In expanding this existing fund, this would bring Maryland alongside states like [New Jersey](#), which has cost-share grant funds to work with farmers with respect to agricultural damage caused by wildlife.

This legislation represents a common sense duplication of an already existing grant program to help assist Maryland farmers with the millions of dollars in damages deer, geese, and other wildlife cause to our state's agricultural output.

As such, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB1511.