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TESTIMONY TO MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

RE: HB0834 Regarding Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens

Hearing Date 02/19/2025

I am a Maryland resident and local farmer who for the last 12 years have had a sheep and wool farm in Dickerson, Maryland. I strongly support HB0834 and ask the Members of this Committee to support this legislation. I base my support on both national health matters and economic issues.

Avian Flu and the Overcrowding of Chickens

The outbreak of Avian Flu among large-scale chicken and egg producing operations is directly related to the crowded conditions under which these birds are kept.

- A 2015 research study entitled Interaction of the role of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDS) by James E Hollenbeck summarized: the “Most significant change in the evolution of the influenza virus is the rapid growth of the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) on a global scale.” Vol 38, Infection, Genetics and Evolution. [10.1016/j.meegid.2015.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.meegid.2015.12.002)
- In Feb. 2006, a multiple author study entitled Confined Animal Feeding Operations as Amplifiers of Influenza concluded: “Influenza pandemics occur when a novel influenza strain, often of animal origin, becomes transmissible between humans. Domestic animal species such as poultry or swine in confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) could serve as local amplifiers for such a new strain of influenza.” <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17187567/>
- And most recently, in Veterinary Medicine News, Brandon Bieltz wrote on March 15, 2024: What is avian influenza and what does it mean for you, farmers and backyard flocks? Veterinarians and researchers at the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine are working to better understand highly pathogenic avian influenza and help the poultry industry manage its risks. How quickly can an avian influenza spread through a flock? It’s usually three to four days from catching the influenza to dying. It’s very quick. But in those three or four days, they are shedding. So, they may not be showing signs, but because they are drinking the same water as the other ones, they are passing the virus. And you hear about the “pecking order.” They will peck on a sick bird, and then they will pick up the virus. **In a commercial flock, where they are close together, it will spread like wildfire.** In three or four days, most of them are affected. If you have a small flock, it may take a week or two to get affected. It is “when,” not “if” other birds will have it. (highlight mine) <https://news.cvm.ncsu.edu/what-is-avian-influenza-and-what-does-it-mean-for-you-farmers-and-backyard-flocks/>

For this reason alone, large scale mass crowding of chickens should be phased out.

Rural Economic Opportunity

I live in the Ag Reserve of Montgomery County where many local farmers raise chickens and sell eggs. The requiring of cage-free operations would increase the ability of these farms to prosper by selling sustainably produced eggs. This policy change would clearly enhance the ability of small farms to compete with national brands that have few or no environmental or health related limits on crowding.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.