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2/17/2025

Memorandum in Support – HB 834

AN ACT concerning Agriculture – Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production – Prohibitions

On behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund—the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals—and our supporters in Maryland, we submit this memo asking you to support HB 834, proposed legislation which would establish vital animal welfare and food safety standards for hens raised and eggs sold in Maryland.

HB 834 would end one of the cruelest factory farm practices.

Battery cage systems force hens to endure extreme confinement—less space per bird than an A4 piece of printer paper—for 18 months before slaughter. The severe limitation of physical movement can lead to metabolic disorders including disuse osteoporosis and liver damage. Hens also commonly suffer from bone fractures because calcium is continually leached from their skeletal system to produce eggs, and their confinement makes it physically impossible for them to get the exercise needed to strengthen their bones. Caged hens are denied almost all their natural behaviors including nesting, perching, foraging, and dustbathing. All of which are critical for their psychological and physical welfare. HB 834 would put an end to this extreme confinement and give hens the space they need to be hens.

HB 834 would improve food safety.

More than a dozen scientific studies have found that cage operations are significantly more likely to harbor *Salmonella* than cage-free facilities.¹ The European Food Safety Authority analysis found 43% lower odds of *Salmonella enteritidis* contamination in cage-free barns.² The egg industry itself acknowledges the problem, with one poultry trade journal admitting, “*Salmonella* thrives in cage housing.”³

Salmonella kills more Americans and sends more people to the hospital than any other foodborne pathogen. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that 142,000 illnesses each year are caused by consuming eggs contaminated with *Salmonella*. Because *Salmonella* can infect the ovaries of hens, eggs from infected birds can be laid with the bacteria already inside. *Salmonella* can survive various cooking methods, (from sunny-side-up, over-easy, to scrambled), according to research funded by the American Egg Board.

Battery egg production externalizes its true cost. The economic cost of the illnesses caused by cage systems, in the form of consumer medical bills, insurance coverage, and lost work productivity, is significant, and this

¹ *An HSUS Report: Food Safety and Cage Egg Production*, HUMANE SOC’Y OF THE U.S. 1 (May 1, 2011), <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/report-food-safety-eggs.pdf> (accessed Feb. 12, 2025).

² *Id.* at 3.

³ Glenn Greenwald, Leighton Akio Woodhouse, *Consumers Are Revolting Against Animal Cruelty — So the Poultry Industry Is Lobbying for Laws to Force Stores to Sell Their Eggs*, THE INTERCEPT (Mar. 2, 2018), <https://theintercept.com/2018/03/02/consumers-are-revolting-against-animal-cruelty-so-the-poultry-industry-is-lobbying-for-laws-to-force-stores-to-sell-their-eggs/> (accessed Feb. 12, 2025).

is to say nothing of the extreme suffering that millions of animals endure in these systems for nearly the entirety of their lives. Shifting to cage-free can drastically reduce these economic, consumer safety, and welfare costs for the price of less than a penny to a few cents per egg.

HB 834 would create market and regulatory certainty.

This legislation would bring Maryland egg-laying hen welfare and food safety standards in line with major food companies and other states that are calling for cage-free conditions. When McDonald's announced it was going cage-free, it stated it wouldn't raise prices at all. More than 200 of the country's largest food companies have committed to switching to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply. This includes Burger King, Unilever, General Mills, Aramark, and Costco, along with Maryland-based Sodexo and Marriott. Already, California, Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona have passed similar cage-free egg laws. It's time for Maryland to be the next.

It is for these reasons that the Animal Legal Defense Fund urges you to pass HB 834. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cat Kelly", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cat Kelly
Legislative Affairs Fellow
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