

FAV. HB1511

To the Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee

By- Ruth Gelaye

NoVasta DMV

Date- March 11th 2025

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 1511, which establishes the Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund.

As a strong environmentalist, highschool student living in Montgomery County, and co-founder of NoVasta, a national organization focused on food insecurity and food waste, I believe this bill represents a critical step toward protecting Maryland's food supply, while also supporting ethical and sustainable wildlife management.

House Bill 1511 directly supports farmers and landowners whose crops and agricultural products are damaged by wildlife. Crop loss from wildlife damage reduces the food supply available to Maryland communities, especially given how much of the Agricultural Reserve makes up Maryland. Further, many farmers who play a crucial role in local food systems face the threat of a financial strain that could limit production and in turn inhibit the economic growth of agricultural production across Maryland. Further, by providing reimbursement for verified wildlife damages, farmers can continue growing food— making this issue most certainly linked to food security. This bill, by helping farmers recover from losses, helps ensure that fresh, nutritious food items remain steadily available and strengthens Maryland's local food systems.

Now, food waste is often discussed in the context of consumer habits, but it's crucial to take a holistic approach, and examine all parts of the food system that generates waste.¹ Specifically, pre-harvest losses due to wildlife damage are often a significant contributor to food waste in Maryland. This bill doesn't just reimburse losses, it actually prevents them from occurring and ensuring that agricultural products fulfill their intended purpose. Compensation for damage

would allow farmers to protect their ¹crops by investing in projects that reduce the availability of attractants to deer, geese, etc. This most certainly aligns with Maryland's broader food sustainability goals.

As a youth environmentalist, I definitely also want to recognize the importance of protecting Maryland's diverse wildlife. House Bill 1511 excludes domesticated animals, and focuses specifically on wildlife that significantly impact agricultural production, while also ensuring that the existence and operations of farmers aren't interfered upon.

Further, this bill requires all applicants to follow Department of Natural Resources recommended preventative measures which alleviates the potential qualms that reimbursement privileges will be abused— making sure it is a last resort rather than a first response. In addition, one of the most impactful aspects of House Bill 1511 is the inclusion of a grant program because it allows for an emergence of more community-led solutions and long-term solutions to wildlife damage rather than temporary fixes.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge the House to support and pass House Bill 1511. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Gelaye

NoVasta DMV

ruthgelaye@gmail.com , 857-423-0260

¹ "Maryland Department of the Environment." *Maryland Department of the Environment*, 2025, <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/recyclingandoperationsprogram/pages/foodscraps.aspx>. Accessed 11 March 2025.