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Date: January 23, 2024
To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judicial Proceedings
From: Grayson Middleton, Government Affairs Manager
Re: SB 189 – Eminent Domain - Ag. and Conservation Easements – Prohibited Taking – **Support**

Delmarva Chicken Association (DCA) the 1,600-member trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, companies, and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and Delaware supports SB 189 and urges a favorable committee report.

Over the last 50 years, the State of Maryland has expended considerable resources and attention on preserving agricultural lands. These programs were initiated to protect food supplies, preserve rural landscapes, and maintain a healthy ecosystem, among other reasons. These efforts have been enormously successful, and today the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) estimates that over 300,000 acres of agricultural land have been permanently preserved through their program.

Eminent domain actions against these preserved lands not only contradict the legislative intent that established these programs but diminish their value and effectiveness. The State's interpretation of "permanent" would naturally be called into question if/when a preserved farm is taken for development purposes by the very entity that deemed it worthy of preservation. This would erode the trust and reduce the participation of farmers considering this essential program. It would also demonstrate a considerable waste of taxpayer resources.

We believe this legislation will strengthen agricultural land preservation and reaffirm the commitments made to Maryland's farmers and landowners who have voluntarily entered into preservation agreements. As such, we urge a favorable vote on SB 189.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at Grayson Middleton at middleton@dcahicken.com or 410-490-3329.

Sincerely,

Grayson Middleton

Government Affairs Manager