



Maryland Farm Bureau

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To: House Ways and Means Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: Favorable with amendments – HB498 Economic Development - Delivering Economic Competitiveness and Advancing Development Efforts (DECADE) Act

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit favorable with amendments testimony for HB498 Economic Development - Delivering Economic Competitiveness and Advancing Development Efforts (DECADE) Act. This legislation would require the Department of Commerce to assess Maryland's industry sectors for potential employment and economic growth, among other changes to programs and commissions.

Agriculture is the leading commercial industry in Maryland, playing a crucial role in the state's economy, environment, and heritage. With over 12,000 farms covering more than two million acres, the industry generates billions of dollars annually through diverse agricultural products, including poultry, corn, soybeans, dairy, and nursery crops. Maryland's strategic location along the East Coast provides access to major markets, while its rich soil and moderate climate support a wide range of farming activities. The state's agricultural sector also contributes significantly to employment, supporting thousands of jobs in farming, processing, and distribution.

Beyond its economic impact, agriculture in Maryland is essential for food security, environmental conservation, and rural development. The industry benefits from state-supported initiatives such as farmland preservation programs, agritourism, and sustainable farming practices to balance productivity with ecological stewardship. Chesapeake Bay conservation efforts are particularly crucial, as Maryland farmers implement best practices to reduce runoff and protect water quality. As the backbone of the state's rural economy, agriculture continues to adapt through innovation, technology, and policy support, ensuring its sustainability and growth for future generations.

As Maryland moves forward with restructuring its economic development policies and programs, it is essential that agriculture remains a top priority. As the state's number one commercial industry, agriculture not only drives economic growth but also sustains rural communities, protects natural resources, and ensures food security. Investing in agricultural innovation, infrastructure, and workforce development will help farmers remain competitive and resilient in an evolving economy. By incorporating agriculture into new economic initiatives, Maryland can strengthen its agricultural sector while promoting sustainable growth and long-term prosperity for the state.

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Please reach out to Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions