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February 18, 2025

House Bill 0907- Property Tax Credit - Urban Agricultural Property - Alterations
House Ways and Means Committee

Position: **Support (FAV)**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on HB0907. My name is Steve Darcey, and I am the Executive Director of the Prince George's Soil Conservation District (the District), which serves to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the State and County and otherwise enhance their living environment by conservation of soil, water, and related resources. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the critical role of the state's Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit in supporting urban farmers and ensuring food security and access in Maryland.

First and foremost, I want to thank Delegate Roberson for sponsoring this crucial bill. Urban agriculture has grown rapidly in many areas of the state to provide fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food to communities. In Prince George's County, our urban farms are not only selling their produce and other ag products direct-to-consumers but donating or selling to food banks and other food assistance providers. While we mainly work with urban farms on implementing soil and water conservation practices, these farms provide green space, agricultural education, employment, internships, and other community engagement opportunities for Prince Georgians in addition to healthy foods.

The original enabling legislation sponsored by Delegate Healey in 2010 opened the door for jurisdictions to develop their own urban ag property tax credits. Prince George's County embraced this opportunity, but there have been unintentional barriers for urban farmers receiving the property tax credit. If the bill alterations are approved, the County has an opportunity to revise its property tax credit legislation and open this incentive to more urban farmers. For example, we have several urban farms in Prince George's County that provide a service in their community, but they are not located in the Priority Funding Area (PFA), a requirement for property tax credit. Furthermore, due to their small size (but certainly not impact) they are ineligible for the state's Agricultural Use Assessment. Removing the PFA language and parcel size from the state-enabling legislation will open this property tax credit opportunity to more urban farms across the state and reward them for their commitment to food access, economic development, and soil and water conservation for our most vulnerable communities. On another note, the original bill was designed for soil-based farming. The District strongly feels this tax credit should include Controlled Environmental Agriculture, also known as indoor farming. Farmers lead the way in innovation every day, so let's acknowledge that in this bill.

In closing, the District reiterates its appreciation for this Committee's support of Maryland agriculture. Your efforts are instrumental in sustaining our agricultural heritage and future, supporting local farmers, and ensuring food security in our county and across the state. Urban agriculture is a vital part of Maryland agriculture's bright future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Darcey, CESP
Executive Director
Prince George's Soil Conservation District