

POSITION STATEMENT – Senate Bill 0284- Opposed
Hearing on the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026
March 2nd, 2026.
Miller Senate Building West, Room 3, Annapolis, MD

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Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Shelby Watson-Hampton, and I'm the Director of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), which is a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. SMADC serves farms, farmers, and small rural businesses mostly in the 5 SOMD Counties, but we also have several statewide programs as well.

I am writing in opposition to SB0284 as it cuts \$300,000 from the SMADC budget, which is approximately a third of our operating funds. I am strongly beseeching your committee to please support the reinstatement of full funding for SMADC as we play a pivotal role in supporting local farmers, promoting agricultural education, expanding the local rural economy, and fostering sustainable practices.

It is important to note that SMADC funds are NOT taxpayer dollars, as they come from a special fund called the Cigarette Restitution Fund. The CRF fund itself is continual and non-lapsing and comes into the State each year. When these funds arrive, they are directed to either the Maryland Department of Health or to SMADC. The Health Department gets approximately \$100 million a year from this CRF fund alone. **SMADC just requests keeping our share of the fund– which is \$1 million dollars annually - so we can continue to support the farmers in our region.**

Our bill for permanent funding of \$1 million a year from the CRF passed the Maryland Legislature in a bi-partisan bill just two Sessions ago – with the Senate passing it unanimously both times, and the House passing it with all Yay votes, except for two. And yet, here we are with the funding in jeopardy again since the Governor's proposed FY26 budget now cuts \$300,000 from SMADC funding. This will deeply impact the agricultural community in Southern Maryland, as well as the farming programs that SMADC promotes statewide. Full funding is essential for supporting the agricultural economy, small business innovation, and food and farming education. **It is worth noting that last fiscal year, with just our one million in base funding, SMADC was able to leverage that to bring in over \$1 million additional dollars in grants to the region. This is a significant return on investment.**

SMADC's success has been proven. In FY24 alone we awarded 30 Farm Mini-Grants to the community totaling \$60,000, awarded scholarships and sponsorships totaling \$15,000, granted an additional \$20,000 to youth farmers in the Southern Maryland Invitational Livestock Expo, and served 467 farms/producers and 8,000 individuals through the consumer-based guides.

We ask that you please advocate for reinstating full funding of \$1 million for SMADC in the coming budget. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shelby Watson-Hampton
Director, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC)
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