

HOUSE BILL 1267 - RELATING TO ZONING PROTECTIONS FOR THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE AND THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER.

FAVORABLE

Chairman, vice chair, and members of the environment and transportation committee,

Purpose: I am requesting your support of **House Bill 1267** (HB 1267), relating to zoning protections for

- **The Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) and**
- **The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC).**

This bill is a common-sense and forward-looking measure that will safeguard two irreplaceable federal research and conservation assets located in our state.

Both PRR and BARC provide critical habitat for hundreds of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibians, and plant species, and functions as a vital green corridor in an otherwise intensely developed region between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore.

- PRR's programs inform migratory bird management, endangered species recovery, pollutant impact assessment, and other core federal and state conservation responsibilities. the PRR is often described as the **"green lungs of Central Maryland,"** because its large forested and wetland areas help clean the air and provide critical habitat in Central Maryland between Washington, DC and Baltimore.
- BART is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's **premier and largest research campus**, covering thousands of acres and employing hundreds of scientists and staff in Maryland. BARC has been at the forefront of research on crop improvement, soil health, climate-resilient agriculture, and animal health, producing practical benefits for farmers, consumers, and taxpayers across the country. Recent federal actions have recognized both its national importance and its vulnerability, including new funding to protect and modernize facilities.

Both Facilities continue to face significant development pressures. Large-scale infrastructure proposals, such as the previously considered **Maglev** route, demonstrated how quickly these lands could be threatened by projects inconsistent with their conservation and research missions. Community members, scientists, and advocacy organizations have repeatedly had to mobilize in crisis mode to defend these federal lands on a case-by-case basis.

Growth -- HB 1267 takes a more **responsible and predictable** future growth approach. By establishing appropriate zoning frameworks for these areas, the bill ensures that local and state land use decisions will be consistent with the federal purposes. Instead of relying on ad hoc battles, HB 1267 creates a clear, proactive policy line that says: these lands are special, and their primary purposes are research, conservation, and **public benefit**, not speculative development.

This bill does not freeze communities in amber or prevent reasonable, compatible uses. Rather, it protects the core functions of these federal campuses while still allowing surrounding areas to grow in ways that respect scientific, ecological, and federal investment priorities. Compatible uses – such as

- educational partnerships,
- low-impact recreation, and
- collaborative research facilities

continue, but harmful, irreversible conversion of critical habitat and research land is discouraged or barred.

Economics: HB 1267 represents **sound fiscal stewardship**. The federal government has already invested billions of dollars over decades in infrastructure, scientific programs, and natural capital at PRF and BARC. State and local governments benefit from

- high-quality jobs,
- collaborative research projects,
- visitor spending, and
- educational programs connected

to these sites. **Discouraging incompatible development** to encroach on or degrade these lands would put those long-term economic benefits at risk and potentially invite future federal disinvestment or relocation.

Some may argue that additional zoning protections could constrain future transportation or economic development options. In reality, this bill encourages better planning by clearly defining where high-impact projects should not go, thereby redirecting growth toward more suitable locations. Rather than creating uncertainty for investors or agencies, HB 1267 **provides clarity** and reduces the likelihood of costly litigation, community conflict, and project delays that often arise when development is proposed in ecologically or scientifically sensitive areas.

Environmental: HB 1267 also advances Maryland's

- **climate,**
- **biodiversity, and**
- **water quality goals.**

The natural areas provide flood mitigation, carbon storage, and water filtration benefits that support the health of the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay watershed. BARC's research directly supports adaptation to climate change and the development of more resilient, sustainable agricultural practices, which are essential to our country and Maryland in particular. Also this Bill works to meet its greenhouse gas reduction and food security objectives.

Summary: For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1267. HB 1267 reflects the values of Maryland residents who have consistently expressed support for

- **protecting open space,**
- **conserving wildlife habitat**

- **defending scientific integrity and**
- **responsible growth**

against

- short-sighted political and/or
- economic pressures.

By passing this bill, the general assembly will be honoring years of local advocacy and ensuring that future generations can continue to learn from, work at, and enjoy these remarkable places.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people and environment of Maryland

Respectfully submitted, Michael J Brown

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