

Written Testimony in Favor of HB1267 - Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)

March 4, 2026

To: Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee

I am submitting testimony in support of HB1267, Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification legislation.

As a Prince George's County resident, I am pleased and honored to have both of these places as nearby neighbors, and appreciate the vital research and ecological benefits that both offer.

This bill is a necessary step to protect the essential research taking place at both the Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), and also to protect the valuable open, natural land that both places carefully nurture. The legislation sets appropriate zoning classifications for these areas, and will support land use decisions that will be consistent with the purposes and goals for which these centers were established.

Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge provides habitat and refuge for a wide range of birds and other wildlife and conducts important research to increase understanding of wildlife and how to offer wildlife protection. The Refuge also offers an outstanding education program for schools and the public.

At BARC, scientists are conducting vital agricultural research that addresses issues of food safety and supply such as:

- Studying the Varroa mite that is killing honeybee populations.
- Developing a vaccine against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.
- Improving productivity of dairy cattle along with decreasing methane emissions from cattle.
- Protecting crops from invasive insects, nematodes, and fungi.

Research at these centers is often geographic-specific to the mid-Atlantic region and cannot be replicated in other regions of the United States.

In addition, these places encompass a large part of state land that long-time Maryland Senator Paul Sarbanes called the Green Lungs of the Chesapeake, and that provide essential ecosystems that benefit the health of Maryland. With the significant building development and loss of forests and green space that Maryland has experienced over the years, this forested land is

essential for providing our region with clean air, clean water, climate resilience, and opportunities for healthy recreation.

As a Prince George's County resident, I also am worried about the American Lung Association's expressed concerns about health risks from the air we breathe in the County. This shows the elemental importance of maintaining the ecological benefits provided by the natural landscape of these "Green Lung" tracts of land.

HB1267 supports continuation of the valuable research at Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, protects nature, and helps ensure a safe and healthy environment for residents.

I urge a favorable vote on HB1267.

Sincerely,

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