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Date: February 27, 2026  
To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment  
From: Grayson Middleton, Government Affairs Manager  
Re: SB 781 – CHERISH Our Communities Act – **Oppose**

Delmarva Chicken Association (DCA) is the trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, companies, and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Collectively, we contribute more than \$5.4 billion to Maryland's economy and pay more than \$254 million in state and local taxes. Due to unique, ongoing issues related to the renewal process of the CAFO general discharge permit, we are compelled to oppose SB 781 as written. However, we have started a dialogue with sponsors and advocates, and we are eager to find a solution that would work for all stakeholders.

The principles of environmental justice are supported by DCA and our 2026 legislative policy book. However, given the current circumstances, our association and the wider agricultural community have serious concerns about the unintended consequences of the inclusion of CAFO general permits in this legislation.

As the members are aware, the CAFO general permit has been expired since July 2025. This has led to severe economic disruptions on the Eastern Shore that have affected not only poultry farmers but builders, grain farmers, livestock farmers, and the banking sector. A conservative estimate of the stalled building costs alone is around \$35 million. This negative economic impact does not account for the incalculable losses of on-farm income, real estate transfers, banking fees, equipment and feed sales, and resulting government revenue.

Because any substantial edits must be approved by the EPA, we are fearful that changes to the permit could result in a significantly longer delay in this process that is already egregiously behind schedule. We simply cannot afford this. For that reason, we would like to work with the sponsors to find a path forward that provides assurances to the advocates while also preventing further economic harm to our agricultural producers.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at [middleton@dcachicken.com](mailto:middleton@dcachicken.com) or 410-490-3329.

Sincerely,

Grayson Middleton

Government Affairs Manager