



HB1267

Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)

Testimony before Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hearing March 31, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Shantanu Ghosh, and I am representing Indivisible Howard County on behalf of its 1900+ members. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of HB1267**, which would conserve the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center as open space, prohibiting commercial or residential development even if sold, leased, or transferred. We thank Delegate Lehman and co-sponsors for introducing this bill.

Both the Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center represent some of the most significant remaining contiguous green space in central Maryland. The Patuxent Research Refuge alone encompasses more than 12,800 acres across Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties, making it the only national wildlife refuge established specifically to support wildlife research.¹ In a region facing rapid suburban growth and increasing development pressure, maintaining protective zoning safeguards critical habitat for migratory birds, pollinators, and native species, while preserving floodplain capacity and carbon-sequestering forests that mitigate climate impacts.

Similarly, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center spans nearly 7,000 acres and is one of the largest and most important agricultural research complexes in the world. Operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it plays a vital role in food security research, climate-resilient crop development, and soil science.² By establishing clear zoning protections now, HB1267 provides long-term certainty that these longstanding public research lands remain safeguarded, regardless of future changes in land ownership or policy priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Shantanu Ghosh

Hanover, Maryland 21076

Sources Cited:

1. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Serv., *Patuxent Research Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan § Mission and History* (2022),
https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/PWR_2022_RevisedCCP.pdf
2. Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Superfund Site Profile, Maryland Dept. of the Environment (2025),
https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/LAND/MarylandBrownfieldVCP/Documents/www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/brownfields/Ag_Resrch_Fac.pdf