

INDEPENDENT INSURANCE AGENTS OF MARYLAND, INC.

DBA BIG I MARYLAND



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Senate Bill 643

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman Feldman and the Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The BIG I MARYLAND ("Big I") is the State's oldest trade association of independent insurance agents. It represents 200 independent agencies, which employ over 2000 people in the state. We represent independent insurance agents and brokers who present consumers with a choice of policy options from a variety of different insurance companies. These small, medium, and large businesses offer a variety of insurance products – including property, casualty, life, health, employee benefit plans, and retirement products.

SB 643 is a comprehensive management bill that addresses the root causes of deer-related problems instead of focusing solely on what happens after a collision or crop loss. In previous sessions, legislation to address the problems associated with the oversized deer population focused on restricting how insurers can surcharge or re-rate drivers after collisions with free-roaming wild animals like deer. Those proposals address an important fairness issue in the insurance code, but they do not reduce the underlying risk: the sheer number of deer on our roads and landscapes.

Even when laws limit surcharges in specific circumstances, the claims still occur, and the aggregate loss costs are ultimately borne by all policyholders through base rates. Insurance rules can change who pays and how, but they do not lessen the total number of crashes, property damage, or injuries.

SB 643 offers a better long-term solution because it goes upstream. By targeting deer overpopulation in areas with documented damage, it will reduce the number of collisions, the amount of agricultural loss, and the extent of environmental degradation before they ever show up as insurance claims or economic losses. Rather than treating symptoms in the insurance market, SB 643 reduces the underlying frequency of loss. From a policy standpoint, the most meaningful way to protect motorists and keep insurance costs sustainable is to lower the number of deer-vehicle collisions. Proactive management through DNR and expanded hunting opportunities, especially on days when more hunters are available, is the most practical way to do that.

High deer density is strongly associated with higher deer-vehicle collision risk. Each deer removed from areas near roadways is one less opportunity for a crash. By allowing more effective

population reduction on affected properties and expanding Sunday hunting, SB 643 can help lower collision exposure over time and improve safety for Maryland motorists.

For these reasons, SB 643 is a more effective, fiscally responsible, and ecologically sound way to address Maryland's deer population and its impacts on motorists, farmers, landowners, and forests than relying on insurance mechanisms alone. It focuses on prevention, uses DNR's expertise, and provides the tools needed to protect safety, property, and the environment.

We respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 643.