

HB972 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Barron Burch III

Position: FAV

Dear Delegates,

My name is Barry Burch. I am a retired Frederick County Public Schools Agricultural Educator, FFA Advisor, and the current Maryland Envirothon Chairperson. I am contacting you to request your support of "House Bill - HB972." This House Bill 972 targets funding for Agricultural Education which we hopefully will include the Maryland Envirothon Program.

The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts sponsor the Maryland Envirothon. The Envirothon is a hands-on, natural resources education competition for high school students. The Envirothon is a program that has county, state, and international (NCF-Envirothon) competition levels. Our Maryland Envirothon students are becoming informed citizens by learning authentic assessment, critical thinking skills, and team-building skills in an outdoor educational setting. These students work in teams of 5 learning about Aquatics, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife, and a Current Environmental Issue that changes from year to year.

The Maryland Envirothon does not have a dedicated funding source, and we rely solely on fundraising and participation dues each year to operate the program. The program is set up so that any high school student in public or private schools, as well as homeschool groups, may participate without any cost.

The 2026 anticipated budget for this year's Maryland Envirothon program is \$65,000.00. The Maryland Envirothon program costs include awards, food, lodging, t-shirts, resource materials, and transportation to the international NCF-Envirothon event. By having a source of dedicated funds each year for the Maryland Envirothon, this would greatly benefit the students and enhance Maryland Envirothon program.

In my 28 years of teaching and working with the Envirothon, I have had the honor to mentor FFA and Envirothon students as they find their path moving forward in life. Some of those students are now a MDA Soil Conservation Planner, a MD DNR Supervisor, a University of Kentucky Plant and Soil Science professor, and an Urban Forester with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The point is: Maryland Agriculture Education and the Maryland Envirothon programs, go hand in hand, creating a monumental, positive impact on a high school student's potential, and their future career aspirations.

Thank you for your support!

Have A Good Day,
Barry Burch
Maryland Envirothon Chair
Barronb29@aol.com

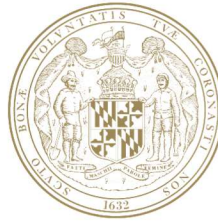
HB 972 senate letter of support.pdf

Uploaded by: Natalie Ziegler

Position: FAV

JEFFERSON L. GHRIST
Co-CHAIR

NATALIE ZIEGLER
Co-CHAIR



H. KEVIN ANDERSON
TERRY BAKER
KEVIN B. HORNBERGER
ANDRE V. JOHNSON, JR.
STEVE JOHNSON
SHEREE SAMPLE-HUGHES

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
HOUSE RURAL CAUCUS

March 31, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Rural Caucus, we are writing to express our support for **HB 972, Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Charles J. Otto Agricultural Education Promise Act)**.

This bill would provide critical funding for the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation and Maryland FFA Association, helping to inspire a new generation of farmers. For these reasons, the Rural Caucus supports HB 972 and requests a favorable report.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jefferson L. Ghrist".

Delegate Jefferson L. Ghrist
Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalie Ziegler".

Delegate Natalie Ziegler
Co-Chair

HB972 - MAEF - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Susanne Richards

Position: FAV



**Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation Position Statement
House Bill 972 – Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund –
Establishment (Charles J. Otto Agricultural Education Promise Act)**

Date: March 25, 2026

Favorable

Submitted to: Education, Energy & Environment Committee

Submitted by: Susanne Richards, Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation
P.O. Box 536, Havre de Grace, MD 21078 – www.maefonline.com

Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation strongly supports HB972 and appreciates the opportunity to carry on the legacy of Del. Charles J. Otto.

In 15 years in the House of Delegates, Del. Otto represented his district, the Eastern Shore, rural Maryland and our state's agricultural community with distinction.

Many of you were friends with him. Like you, I counted Del. Otto as a friend: We met in the late 1990s when he served on the Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board and thanks to our mutual careers in agriculture, continued to cross paths over the following decades. His friendship, knowledge, humor and statesmanship were an asset to all of us.

Del. Otto's legacy of service began before his first election. At Washington High School in Princess Anne, he was a member of the FFA chapter and ultimately served as the State FFA Vice President in 1982-83.

Maryland FFA is a key component of the ideal agricultural education experience, bringing personal, leadership and career development opportunities to members to augment their classroom instruction and supervised agricultural experiences (SAE). There is no doubt that the leadership skills he learned in Maryland FFA served him for the rest of his life. You will see, in the Maryland FFA officers and members who testify on behalf of this bill, both poise and passion that comes from their experiences in FFA.

MAEF has been a proud partner with Maryland FFA Agriculture for more than two decades. In addition to working with FFA, MAEF staff provide professional development opportunities for agriculture teachers by working with the Maryland Agriculture Teachers Association, mentoring and assistance for new agriculture educators setting up their first classrooms, representation at the Maryland State

Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Division and Program Advisory Committees, and helped link industry needs with the newly updated program standards. MAEF also supports agricultural career exploration in our middle schools, public libraries and communities and brings our four Mobile Science Labs to approximately 125 elementary schools each year, introducing hands-on science within the context of agriculture to students. We work with the Maryland Envirothon, LEAD Maryland, Future Harvest, the Outdoor Learning Partnership, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Farm Bureau, the University of Maryland, Maryland 4-H, our commodity groups and many others to provide leadership and programming from the youngest learners to post-secondary levels.

Agriculture and our resource-based industries in Maryland account for more than \$30.2 billion in economic activity, 108,461 supported jobs and more than \$1.1 billion in State and Local tax revenue. (Equine adds even more.) While this is impressive, agriculture's contributions to our economy, environment and quality of life are equally impressive:

- Stewards and preserves productive open spaces.
- Strengthens our rural economy through entrepreneurship.
- Contributes significantly to Maryland's tax base through property taxes.
- Provides a reliable local supply of food.
- Supports habitat for Maryland wildlife while actively managing lands for improved water quality and mitigation of invasive species and nuisance weeds.

Successfully stewarding agriculture's long-term sustainability requires essential supports, including a workforce pipeline, appropriate policies and a commitment from state leadership.

Your support for HB972 builds upon Del. Otto's legacy of support for Maryland agriculture and its future. Thank you for your favorable consideration.

MDFB - Support - HB972 Maryland Fair and Agricultu

Uploaded by: Tyler Hough

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau

3358 Davidsonville Road | Davidsonville, MD 21035

410-922-3426 | www.mdfarmbureau.com

March 31, 2026

To: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of HB972 - Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Charles J. Otto Agricultural Education Promise Act)**

On behalf of the over 7,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in favor of HB972 Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Charles J. Otto Agricultural Education Promise Act). This legislation as amended, would add a \$200k appropriation in the budget to support the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation and Maryland FFA.

Agricultural education plays a crucial role in shaping the next generation of leaders, farmers, and informed consumers. Programs such as 4-H, FFA, and agricultural education in schools provide hands-on learning experiences that connect students to the agricultural industry while also teaching them valuable life skills. Through participation in these programs, young people develop leadership abilities, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and strong work ethic—qualities that benefit them regardless of their career paths. Additionally, agricultural education fosters a deeper appreciation for the role of farming in our economy, food supply, and environmental sustainability, helping to build a well-informed citizenry that supports and understands agriculture's significance.

Ensuring the continued success of agricultural education programs is essential not only for the students who directly benefit but also for the broader agricultural industry and local economies. These programs contribute to workforce development, fostering a pipeline of skilled individuals who will drive innovation and sustainability in agriculture. Without adequate funding, access to agricultural education and hands-on learning experiences will decline, potentially leading to long-term consequences for industry and rural communities. To maintain and expand these critical programs, alternative funding solutions must be explored, and policymakers must prioritize investment in agricultural education. Supporting these initiatives is not just about preserving tradition, it is about securing a strong future for Maryland's agricultural sector and ensuring that young people have the knowledge and skills to succeed in an ever-changing world.

For these reasons, Maryland Farm Bureau respectfully asks for a favorable report on HB972.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough", is positioned below a horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

Tyler Hough

Director of Government Relations

Please reach out to Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions