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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 6, 2026

Testimony in Support of HB 395

Water Pollution Control - Discharge Permits - Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

**HB 395, Water Pollution Control - Discharge Permits - Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations**, repeals a requirement that a person hold a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) general discharge permit issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) before the person may begin construction on any part of a new CAFO.

**The bill's purpose is to ensure continuity of business for the agriculture community, increase efficiency in renewing poultry operations, and prevent losses across the Eastern Shore from permitting delays.**

On July 7th, 2025, the General Discharge Permit for Animal Feeding Operations, as issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), expired without beginning the renewal process. Generally, permit renewal takes under a year from submittal to approval. While the renewal has been submitted, a new permit has not been issued, and may not be issued until August 2026. The gap in the expired permit caused a major pause for growers who were in the pipeline for construction on new chicken houses due to a 2019 provision in law which prohibits the construction on any part of a chicken farm prior to full coverage under a CAFO general permit.

**For clarity, it is not the intention of HB 395 to take steps backwards on Maryland's environmental safeguards or goals, or to divert from current CAFO application processes.** This bill will not have any effect on water or air quality. HB395 does not eliminate permitting, weaken water protections, or allow unregulated CAFOs to operate. **A CAFO cannot legally house birds or generate manure without coverage under the general CAFO permit. HB 395 does not change that.** This bill's intention is not to eliminate public notice, comment periods, or permit review. Further, any grower would still need to be fully compliant with the terms of the CAFO permit before receiving coverage under the general permit and placing birds. Compliance with the permit prohibits

“discharge of pollutants, including manure, litter, or processed wastewater to surface waters of the State from CAFO production areas.”

The poultry industry of the Eastern Shore is the cornerstone of Maryland’s agrarian economy, contributing more than \$5.4 billion per year to Maryland’s economy, which is one of the many reasons why agriculture is the number one commercial industry in Maryland.

It is my desire that HB 395 considers the agricultural community at the center of this discussion. The inability of growers to begin the building process is detrimental to Maryland’s agricultural economy and is adversely impacting local growers, forcing them into financial jeopardy. HB 395 will prevent this issue from occurring in the future, should there be another permitting gap, and will minimize the economic burden of any further delays on growers, while continuing to protect the environment.

Thank you for your consideration, and I urge a favorable report for HB 395.

Sincerely,



Regina T. Boyce