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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 972 - Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Maryland  
Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act)  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
February 25, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 972 - Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - Establishment (Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Act). This proposed legislation seeks to establish the Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund, a dedicated, ongoing fund aimed at promoting agricultural education and fairs across the state. The fund will be self-sustaining, with any interest earned being reinvested back into it. Additionally, the bill allocates \$1,450,000 annually from the state's lottery revenues, before any other funds are directed to the General Fund, to support this initiative.

In addition, the bill eliminates the previous requirement for using specific funds from the state horse racing special fund to support agricultural fairs and education, consolidating funding sources under the new promise fund.

Agricultural education plays a critical role in Maryland's future, helping equip the next generation with essential skills in agriculture, environmental sciences, and agribusiness. These programs are vital for both sustaining the state's agricultural heritage and ensuring its future economic and environmental health. By preparing students and young professionals with the tools to succeed, the state is fostering long-term growth in a key sector.

Agricultural fairs, too, are central to Maryland's agricultural legacy. These events offer farmers an opportunity to showcase locally grown produce, livestock, and crafts, building stronger connections between producers and consumers. They provide valuable economic stimulus for local communities and serve as a platform for celebrating Maryland's agricultural products.

Beyond their economic impact, agricultural fairs also serve as important educational hubs, offering workshops, demonstrations, and competitions that promote awareness of sustainable farming practices and the challenges faced by farmers. These events help bridge the gap between urban and rural communities, increasing public appreciation for the vital role agriculture plays in the state's culture and economy.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of HB 972.