



Maryland Farm Bureau

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March 10, 2026

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Opposition to HB1268 – CHERISH Our Communities Act**

On behalf of the more than 7,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in respectful but firm opposition to HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act, as currently written. While Maryland Farm Bureau strongly supports environmental justice and responsible stewardship, we are deeply concerned about the bill's impact on agricultural operations, particularly its inclusion of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) general discharge permits. Maryland's CAFO general permit expired in July 2025, and the failure to renew it has already caused major disruptions throughout the agricultural economy. More than \$35 million in agricultural construction and expansion projects remain stalled, and additional losses, such as reduced on-farm income, delayed real estate transactions, lower equipment and feed sales, and diminished state and local revenue, continue to strain rural communities. Because any substantive changes to the permit must be approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, adding new statutory requirements at this time risks extending the already damaging delay by months or even years, a burden the agricultural sector cannot absorb.

HB1268 also unfairly singles out CAFO operations by applying new requirements to only a small subset of general permits while excluding many other industrial and potentially polluting activities, such as oil-contaminated groundwater operations, surface coal mining discharges, asphalt plants, and seafood processing. This selective treatment imposes additional uncertainty and open-ended public input requirements on family-owned, zero-discharge farms that already operate under one of the most rigorous permitting frameworks in the state. The CAFO permitting process is already complex and includes a lengthy application, comprehensive nutrient and soil conservation plans, public comment opportunities, hearings, administrative review, and strict ongoing compliance obligations once coverage is granted. Adding further layers to an already "dizzying" regulatory process will only compound existing delays and confusion.

The bill's definition of "At-Risk Census Tract" also presents serious problems. By designating any census tract in the 99th percentile for proximity to CAFOs as "at-risk," the bill effectively categorizes large portions of the Eastern Shore as areas requiring heightened review, simply because agriculture is a dominant land use in that region. This would subject nearly every permit in these communities to expanded requirements and undefined permit conditions. It also places family farms in the same category as hazardous waste landfills, emitting power plants, and mining operations, an inaccurate and unfair comparison that fails to reflect the realities of rural Maryland. The definition does not account for differences between rural and urban land use or the fact that CAFOs in Maryland are designed and regulated as zero-discharge operations.

The cumulative economic harm caused by the ongoing permit lapse is already significant, affecting farm investment decisions, lending, equipment purchases, construction projects, and the financial stability of



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allied industries. Introducing new statutory requirements through HB1268 at this moment threatens to worsen an already critical situation for Maryland farmers and the broader agricultural economy. Maryland Farm Bureau appreciates the constructive dialogue with the bill sponsors and advocates and remains committed to working collaboratively on solutions that address community concerns without exacerbating the permit crisis. However, as written, HB1268 increases uncertainty, imposes unjustified burdens on farming families, and risks further economic damage across rural Maryland. For these reasons, Maryland Farm Bureau respectfully opposes HB1268.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please contact Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions