

## **Sponsor Testimony – Delegate Anne Healey**

### **In Support of House Bill 91 Environment and Transportation Committee**

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 91.

In 2016, this body enacted the Pollinator Protection Act. Maryland chose to lead by acknowledging that certain uses of neonicotinoid pesticides posed serious risks to pollinators and the environment, particularly where those uses provided little or no benefit. House Bill 91 is a direct continuation of that work, grounded in updated science and practical experience.

Since 2016, the agricultural evidence has become increasingly clear. Multiple studies—including research conducted here in Maryland—show that neonicotinoid-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds do not increase yields. These seed treatments are typically applied prophylactically, regardless of whether pest pressure is present. As a result, millions of acres are treated annually without demonstrated agronomic benefit.

Because neonicotinoids are systemic and highly persistent, they do not remain confined to the target crop. They accumulate in soil, migrate into surface and groundwater, and move throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This persistence contributes to pollinator decline, affects aquatic invertebrates, and disrupts ecosystems that Maryland has invested decades and billions of dollars to restore.

House Bill 91 responds to this reality by focusing narrowly and intentionally on low-benefit, high-risk uses: neonic-treated commodity seeds and cosmetic applications on outdoor ornamental plants and turf. The bill is carefully designed to avoid harming agricultural production. It includes clear, time-limited waivers for legitimate agricultural or environmental emergencies, requires consultation with the Departments of Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources, and mandates written directives and reevaluation to ensure transparency and accountability.

Just as importantly, HB 91 reflects what farmers themselves increasingly recognize—that integrated pest management, pest risk assessments, and targeted treatments are more effective and more economical than routine, blanket applications.

In addition to these agricultural and environmental concerns, there is growing attention to potential human health impacts. Neonicotinoids act on nicotinic acetylcholine receptors, which play a critical role in brain development and neurological function. While the human data are still developing, peer-reviewed studies have associated chronic exposure with developmental and neurological effects, raising particular concern for pregnant women and young children. Because these chemicals contaminate surface and drinking water sources, reducing unnecessary use is also a prudent step to limit population-wide exposure.

House Bill 91 reflects Maryland's longstanding commitment to evidence-based policymaking. It protects pollinators, safeguards the Bay, respects farmers, and responds responsibly to evolving science.

This bill honors the intent of the 2016 law and updates it based on what we now know.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report on House Bill 91.

Thank you.