

House Bill 1543

Position: Unfavorable

Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections

Date: March 5, 2026

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice for business in Maryland. We are a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members and federated partners working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic health and growth for Maryland businesses, employees, and families.

The Maryland Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) writes in respectful opposition to House Bill 1543 – a labor and employment measure that would create a new Temporary Worker Oversight Unit in the Maryland Department of Labor and impose numerous new requirements on employers of temporary workers. As drafted, HB 1543 stands to have substantial unintended consequences for Maryland’s agricultural and landscape industries, which rely heavily on H-2A and H-2B labor to sustain operations.

Maryland farms, nurseries, and landscaping firms already operate on narrow margins and face intense competition from out-of-state producers. H-2A and H-2B workers are essential to planting, harvesting, maintenance, and seasonal operations where recruiting resident workforce can be a significant challenge. Adding a new oversight unit, mandatory registrations, bonding requirements, unannounced inspections, and expanded administrative processes will create significant new costs and regulatory burdens for these businesses. Many small and mid-sized businesses in these sectors lack the administrative capacity to absorb these new requirements without reducing investment in the workforce or scaling back production.

Further, the requirement that recruiters post a surety bond, coupled with civil penalties up to \$10,000 per affected worker and liability for joint employer/recruiter actions, exposes agricultural and landscape employers to increased legal risk that could discourage the lawful use of temporary labor altogether. In an industry already struggling with labor shortages and rising input costs, these additional risks will likely translate into higher prices for consumers and reduced competitiveness for Maryland producers.

In addition to the private sector compliance costs, HB 1543 mandates the creation of a new oversight unit within the Maryland Department of Labor, complete with data collection, reporting requirements, inspections, interpretation services, and annual reporting to the General Assembly. Establishing and operating this unit will require significant new expenditure of state resources, funds which are in short supply.

For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests an unfavorable report on HB 1543.

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