



Maryland Farm Bureau

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March 5, 2026

To: House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Opposition of HB1543 Labor and Employment - Temporary Workers**

On behalf of the over 7,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I provide written testimony in opposition of HB1543 Labor and Employment - Temporary Workers. While we share the goals of ensuring worker protection and fair treatment, HB 1543 creates an expansive new regulatory regime that introduces unnecessary risks and burdens for agricultural employers. The bill establishes a new Temporary Worker Oversight Unit within the Department of Labor, granting broad authority to collect data, conduct unannounced inspections of work sites and employer-provided housing, and examine payroll, transportation, and safety compliance. Such new layers of oversight and enforcement run counter to Farm Bureau policy, which calls for reasonable and properly noticed inspections and opposes expansions of state-level labor mandates affecting H-2A employers.

Of particular concern is the provision granting labor organizations and various advocacy, outreach, legal, and health groups the right to access employer-owned or employer-provided housing at the invitation of a temporary worker. According to the bill, these organizations may enter these private areas for up to 10 hours per month, but the legislation sets no limit on the number of organizations that may access the premises or the degree to which their time on site may overlap. In effect, this grants open-ended access to non-employees on private farm property. As the American Farm Bureau Federation has noted in analyzing similar proposals, this kind of mandated access significantly expands employer liability. The presence of non-employees on the premises increases general legal exposure, including insurance risks, potential disturbances, and safety concerns. It also implicates compliance obligations under the federal Food Safety Modernization Act, which requires farms governed by FSMA rules to document certain site visitors to maintain food safety integrity. The cumulative effect of these risks introduces untenable exposure for the employer and could jeopardize the stability of the entire agricultural operation, put differently, the livelihood of both the workers and the farm family themselves.

We must also consider whether HB 1543 actually solves the problems it aims to address. If the intent is to prevent exploitation or misconduct, the more direct and effective path is to improve employer education and training. Maryland already has mechanisms—both federal and state—to hold H-2A and H-2B employers accountable for bad actors. Rather than creating a broad new state unit, duplicative enforcement authority, and sweeping access provisions, Maryland should invest in outreach and compliance assistance that equips employers with best practices. Farm



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Bureau supports transparency, fairness, and worker protections, but believes that an educational strategy, rather than an expansive enforcement bureaucracy, is the more practical course of action to address any identified shortcomings.

Finally, the fiscal reality facing the state cannot be ignored. With a projected \$1.5 billion budget shortfall, now is hardly the time to create a new statewide regulatory unit with permanent appropriations and annual reporting requirements. HB 1543 requires the Department to develop and manage a new enforcement entity, produce annual reports, provide interpretation services, and administer new registration and bonding systems for recruiters—all of which come with ongoing costs at a time when the state is already facing severe fiscal pressure.

For these reasons, expanded liability, erosion of private property protections, duplicative regulatory burdens, and the creation of a costly new oversight bureaucracy, Maryland Farm Bureau respectfully urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 1543. Maryland farmers remain committed to supporting their workforce and complying with all state and federal requirements, but this legislation moves in a direction that is unworkable, unnecessary, and ultimately harmful to the very agricultural operations that depend on temporary workers.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Maryland agriculture.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Hough', written over a horizontal line.

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

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