



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture Legislative Comment Date: February 17th, 2026

BILL NUMBER: HB 471
BILL TITLE: Public Safety - State and Local Governments - Use of Unmanned Aircraft
MDA POSITION: CONCERN

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) respectfully submits this letter in opposition of *House Bill 471 - Public Safety - State and Local Governments - Use of Unmanned Aircraft*.

House Bill 471 prohibits a unit of State government from using an unmanned aircraft "for any other purpose", with the exceptions outlined in section (B) list specific instances related to public safety. This bill will have an impact on the operations of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, restricting the agency from leveraging the most advanced and cost effective methods for forest pest management, invasive species inspections and control, aerial imagery collection, topography surveys for resource conservation projects. Beyond the agency, quasi-governmental units such as Soil Conservation Districts and County Pest Management teams incorporate drones to enhance operations and streamline workflows by reducing manpower historically required to perform current tasks.

Full restrictions on unmanned aircraft for state and local governments will have broad negative impacts on the agricultural industry, the management of invasive species, and the success of the \$8 billion agricultural economy. Prohibiting the use of these tools to enhance governmental support of the agricultural industry will cause operational impacts at the department, and hinder progress on industry-wide initiatives with the agency's support. For these reasons, MDA opposes HB 471 and respectfully requests an unfavorable report. MDA appreciates the consideration of the above information in the Committee's deliberations.

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