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RE: HB 590 - Howard County – Transfer Tax – Use of Proceeds of Ho. Co. 12-26

Date: House Ways and Means Committee – February 10, 2026

Position: Support

Dear Chair Wilkins and Ways and Means Committee Members,

Howard County has long been a leader in agricultural land preservation. The installment purchase program created in the mid-1980's was the first of its kind in the nation. This program has been successful, but the county has consistently faced significant development pressures. As a result of this the vast majority of the land in the county is now either developed or preserved.

My family's farm has been in agricultural preservation since 1986. That means that about 40 years ago we decide to permanently and legally restrict the farm to agricultural uses, forgoing the opportunity to develop for residential or unrelated commercial activities. We know that the definition of agriculture changes over time. Since 1743 our farm has been farmed for tobacco, for wheat, to raise and sell work horses, for dairy, for beef to name a few of the iterations. At one time the farm was almost entirely planted in tomatoes.

A viable agricultural industry depends on both the availability of land and the ability of farmers to diversify their operations and remain profitable. Allowing a portion of the transfer tax to be used for innovative operations and environmental improvements while maintaining adequate funds to purchase easements from remaining interested property owners supports the land and the farmer. Expanding the funding available for innovative agricultural practices is particularly important at a time when farmers are receiving multiple offers every week for solar installations that constitute a real threat to productive agricultural land and the maintenance of the rental land that is important for profitable agriculture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann Holmes Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.