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#7: March 5, 2021

Welcome to the seventh hotline. This week was filled with bill testimony on areas such as minimum wage exemption, Calvert County agritourism building exemption, and food system resiliency. Committees are starting to move bills and both chambers are starting twice a day floor sessions to work through all the bills moving out of committee. Next week we will see fewer bill hearings and more committee voting sessions as the bill crossover deadline gets closer. To contact legislators and follow important bills, visit Maryland Farm Bureau's [action center](#) and select "key legislation".

The following bills will be heard next week:

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

SB 668: Good Job Opportunities for High School Graduates Act of 2021
Senator Rosapepe, EHEA at 1:00 PM in 2 West Miller

This bill requires county boards of education to consider the pursuit of Career & Technology Education (CTE) certificates, certifications, or apprenticeships as the equivalent of pursuing postsecondary education. It authorizes a student or student's parent or guardian to release the student's information to eligible apprenticeship sponsors and employers. Finally, the bill requires public high schools to inform students of employment and skills training opportunities through apprenticeships and CTE certifications.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support the career technology education program in Maryland. We recommend that local boards of education, with state support, introduce an approved production agriculture program in Maryland junior/senior or senior high

schools. We strongly recommend that the State board of education institute standards for agricultural education programs that include teaching agriculture, Ag economics and general agribusiness.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 668

SB 813: Workers' Compensation - Occupational Disease Presumptions - COVID-19
Senator Klausmeier, FIN at 1:00 PM in 3 East Miller

This bill would allow employees that are considered essential workers who are suffering from the effects of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 are presumed to have an occupational disease that was suffered in the line of duty or course of employment to be compensated through workman's comp. This bill would require an individual who is eligible for these benefits to provide a copy of the positive test or the written documentation confirming the diagnosis to the employer or insurer.

The primary focus of the bill is on first responders and health care workers. However, it also includes businesses that were included as essential during the COVID Pandemic. This would include agriculture. In most cases, the farm worker is not exposed to the public and would have a significantly less risk of contracting the virus at work. However, this bill would allow that worker to claim workman's comp by showing a positive test result. This would be devastating to farm operations.

We would support this exemption language that is currently included in the paid sick leave law: "Employee" does not include an individual who is employed in the agricultural sector on an agricultural operation under § 5-403(a) of the Courts Article.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES SB 813

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

HB 1078: Attorney General - Climate Change Actions - Authorization
Delegate Terrasa, HGO at 1:00 PM in 240 HOB

This bill authorizes the Attorney General to investigate, commence, and prosecute or defend any civil or criminal suit or action that holds accountable businesses whose tortious or otherwise unlawful conduct has contributed to climate change through fraud, deception, or any other mechanism, action, inaction, or practice. The bill also authorizes the Attorney General to hire outside counsel on a contingency fee basis to assist if the Attorney General determines that hiring outside counsel is in the state's best interest.

This bill is extremely broad and would open up farms to potential lawsuits if the Attorney General determines a farming practice, action or inaction contributes to climate change.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES HB 1078

Thursday, March 11, 2021

HB 634: Association Health Coverage Plans
Delegate Beitzel, HGO at 1:30 PM 240 HOB

This bill specifies that for purposes of group health insurance, an "association" may include a chamber of commerce. The bill repeals application of Maryland's small group market reforms to any health benefit plan offered by an association, a professional employer organization, or any other entity, including a plan issued under the laws of another state. The definitions of "health benefit plan" are altered to exclude certain association plans from premium rate review and to exclude a multiple employer trust or association from the requirements of the small group market.

As Maryland Farm Bureau looks into ways to provide more services to Maryland farmers and rural businesses, affordable health care coverage is an area that has shown to be a major area of concern. We are asking to be added to the Chamber of Commerce as eligible entities to offer association health coverage plans.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 634 WITH AMENDMENT

HB 1017: Income Tax Credit for Venison Donation – Alterations, Extension, and Testing for Chronic Wasting Disease
Delegate Beitzel, W&M at 1:30 PM 130 HOB

This bill increases from \$50 to \$75 the maximum amount of qualified expenses an individual may claim as a credit against the State income tax when they donate processed deer meat to a food bank. It also increases from \$200 to \$600 the maximum aggregate credit amount the individual may claim in a taxable year. This bill extends for 5 years the termination date of the credit. Lastly, the bill requires the Department of Natural Resources to report to the General Assembly on or before December 31, 2021, on testing of deer for chronic wasting disease.

Current law does not put a maximum aggregate credit on deer that are harvested under a deer crop damage permit. This bill does not effect that part of the law.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support a state tax credit for each deer donated to a food bank or other food donation non-profit under a crop damage permit.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 1017

Maryland Farm Bureau members are urged to contact their legislators and members of the relevant committees in support of Farm Bureau's positions on the bills listed above. To contact legislators and follow important bills, visit Maryland Farm Bureau's [action center](#) and select "key legislation".

Committees & Room Numbers:

Senate: Budget & Taxation (B&T), 3 West Miller; Education, Health & Environmental Affairs (EHEA), 2 West Miller; Finance (FIN), 3 East Miller; Judicial Proceedings (JPR), 2 East Miller

House: Appropriations (APP), 120 HOB; Economic Matters (ECM), 230 HOB; Environment & Transportation (E&T), 250 HOB; Health & Government Operations (HGO), 240 HOB; Judiciary (JUD), 100 HOB; Ways & Means (W&M), 130 HOB

In Other Ag News

2021 Farm Bureau FUSION Conference

For the first time ever, Farm Bureau is offering the FUSION Conference for FREE through a virtual conference experience on March 11-13, 2021. The FUSION Conference is an opportunity to bring together members of the Young Farmers & Ranchers, Women's Leadership and Promotion & Education member engagement programs for an opportunity to connect, learn and develop as leaders in Farm Bureau. [Register here.](#)



NRCS Announces April 2 Application Deadline for Conservation Stewardship Program in Maryland

The next deadline for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications to be considered for funding in Maryland this year is April 2, 2021. Through CSP, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps farmers and forest landowners earn payments for expanding conservation activities while maintaining agricultural production on their land. CSP also encourages adoption of new technologies and management techniques. [More here.](#)

Grain Bin Safety Week 2021

Win safety equipment for your local fire department. The [Nominate Your Fire Department Contest](#) runs from January 1 through April 30 and awards grain rescue tubes and hands-on training to help first responders save lives. The contest is made possible thanks to the support of [National Education Center for Agricultural Safety \(NECAS\)](#), [KC Supply](#) and our other [partners](#). [More here.](#)

SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans Available for Excessive Rain Following Secretary of Agriculture Disaster Declaration in Maryland

The U.S. Small Business Administration announced that Economic Injury Disaster Loans are available to small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses

engaged in aquaculture and private nonprofit organizations in Caroline, Kent, and Queen Annes counties in Maryland as a result of excessive rain that occurred from Aug. 1 to Sept. 1, 2020. Under this declaration, the SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program is available to eligible farm-related and nonfarm-related entities that suffered financial losses as a direct result of this disaster. Applicants may apply online using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via SBA's secure website [here](#) and should apply under the SBA declaration #16874, not for the COVID-19 incident. [More here.](#)



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