Dear Chairman Barve:

The Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition members signed above SUPPORT HB 904 and request a FAVORABLE report by this committee.

HB 904 would enable the State to obtain better information about agriculture practices, manure transport and water quality on the Eastern Shore, as well as improve transparency and fairness in the State’s industrial agriculture permitting program.

Agriculture is the single, largest source of pollution to the Chesapeake Bay, and it can contaminate local waterways. About 44 percent of the nitrogen and 57 percent of the phosphorus polluting the Bay come from farms, and much of that comes from animal manure. Phosphorus pollution causes algae blooms that threaten public health, kills underwater grasses, harms crabs, oysters and fish and contributes to the enormous “dead zone” in the Bay.

Maryland is working on solutions, but our progress is hamstrung by a lack of information and a dysfunctional permitting system. Maryland is danger of falling behind on implementing the Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT), due to the slow progress of collecting farm FIV data and various requests from industry to delay implementation of the regulations. (See attached fact sheet.)

The State also faces a number of other challenges, including insufficient resources for enforcing nutrient management plans, an inability to track where excess manure gets delivered through the Manure Transport Program, a backwards permitting process for new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and a lack of monitoring for local water quality.

HB 904 would solve these problems by:

- Helping the agriculture industry comply with the state’s Phosphorous Management Tool and effectively enforce nutrient management plans
- Creating a voluntary system to track manure transport and land application by private companies
- Updating the permitting timeline and fees for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
- Resuming water quality monitoring at nine stations on the Lower Eastern Shore
The Chesapeake Bay is showing signs of progress, but many threats remain. Maryland can help restore the Bay and local waterways by making sure the agriculture industry does its part for clean water. This bill would help the state gain critical information and update processes to ensure we meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup obligations and protect local waterways.

For all these reasons, we respectfully request a FAVORABLE report on HB 904.

For more information, contact: Dawn Stoltzfus, coordinator, Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition, at 410.267.4153 or dawn@thehatchergroup.com.