Filed on behalf of Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition (MCAC) partners: Assateague Coastal Trust, Audubon Naturalist Society, Center for Progressive Reform, Clean Water Action, Common Cause Maryland, Environmental Integrity Project, Gunpowder Riverkeeper, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, Severn Riverkeeper, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Date: February 15, 2016
Committee: Senate Budget and Taxation
Subject: SUPPORT for adequate funding for Enforcement at MDA and MDE

Dear Chairman Kasemeyer, Vice Chair Madaleno, Subcommittee Chair DeGrange and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

The Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition members signed above strongly support increased funding for the inspection and enforcement budgets for both the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Maryland Department of the Environment.

Since 2000, the Water Management Administration within MDE has lost nearly one-third of its overall inspection staff. In fact, MDE’s General Fund appropriations shrunk (in absolute terms) between 2004 – 2014, even as the state budget as a whole increased by more than 60 percent.

At MDA, 10 or fewer inspectors are tasked with inspecting more than 5,000 agricultural operations, and therefore the inspection rate hovers around 15 percent each year. With the increasing obligations of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL and other regulatory requirements, these agencies’ enforcement and inspection budgets are simply inadequate.

The Nutrient Management Advisory Committee, which includes agricultural interests such as the Maryland Farm Bureau and the Delmarva Poultry Industry, recommended more staff and funding at MDA to implement nutrient management laws. The committee has stated:

“MDA nutrient management staff levels limit the capacity to address the workload associated with 5,426 operators across the State. Adequate resources are also needed to improve and administer the database that tracks implementation and compliance. Providing MDA with the resources to report aggregated data on the performance of agricultural operation is essential as Maryland tracks TMDL requirements.”

This is an ideal time to correct the inadequacies of the MDA and MDE budgets. Not only is there a critical need within these agencies, but this year – for the first time in a decade – the state general fund budget is forecasted to be in a structural surplus, which is also expected to continue in future years. However, despite the projected surplus, the FY 2017 budget does not propose restoring enforcement resources to MDA and MDE. In fact, both agencies would lose overall positions under the proposed budget, while most agencies are seeing an increase in the number of filled positions.

Although the scale of the problem is large, we can afford to take concrete steps that will help address the problem. For example, doubling the number of nutrient management inspectors at MDA would likely cost less than $1 million and restoring the inspection staff to MDE’s Water Management Administration could cost between $1 and $2 million. And importantly, there is no more cost-effective way to reduce pollution than to inspect and maintain the pollution control practices already in place and enforce the laws already on the books. An ounce of prevention can save many pounds of pollution.

We ask that you support increased general fund support for enforcement and inspection personnel at MDA and MDE to protect our public health, our natural resources, and the integrity of our agricultural economy.

For more information, contact: Dawn Stoltzfus, coordinator, Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition, at 410-990-0284 or dawn@thehatchergroup.com

The Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition is working to improve Maryland waterways and protect public health by reducing pollution, and increasing transparency and accountability, from agriculture and other associated sources of water degradation. www.marylandcleanagriculture.org @CleanerMDfarms