



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

LEGISLATIVE COMMENT

DATE: February 25, 2020

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 964

SHORT TITLE: AGRICULTURE - HEMP RESEARCH AND PRODUCTION - PROHIBITIONS

MDA POSITION: OPPOSE

EXPLANATION:

Senate Bill 964 prohibits the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) from certifying and registering a site under the Hemp Research Pilot Program or licensing a person to produce hemp under the Hemp Farming Program, if the growing area is located within two miles of a residential community with 10 or more residences.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

MDA's Industrial Hemp Pilot Program has seen significant interest from farmers across the state looking to explore the viability of this emerging agricultural commodity. In 2019, the program registered 69 growers in 20 counties to grow hemp across 1,572 acres and 1,097,000 square feet of greenhouse space. The program began accepting applications for the 2020 growing season earlier this year and has already received 28 applications. The enthusiasm for the crop and its uses is very strong.

The proposed two-mile radius required by SB 964 would severely impact this burgeoning agricultural industry. Maryland is a densely populated state, with much of its farmland within a two-mile radius of 10 or more residences. MDA estimates this bill would eliminate 8,000 acres of farmland per buffer zone. This legislation would affect farmers in all counties but would especially limit opportunities for urban and suburban farmers looking to enter the industry or diversify an existing farm operation.

Additionally, the proposed legislation would require MDA staff to conduct extensive on-site review for every application, greatly increasing the program's workload and adversely impacting the amount of time and resources required to approve and application.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at cassie.shirk@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.