

(Attachment B.)

Leaders of the Montgomery County Agricultural Community

June 22, 2015

Dear County Council Members:

The leaders of the agricultural community attended the June 18, 2015 PHED Committee work session on Bill 25-15 and you asked several questions that we are responding to below. We would welcome the opportunity to actually sit at the table on Monday, June 22, 2015 during the next PHED Committee work session to review the responses below and answer any additional questions that you may have.

We support the County Executive's recommendation to create the Office of Agriculture. We also agree with Council Staff Jacob Sesker that agricultural businesses have different needs compared to urban businesses and agricultural issues are very unique. Therefore, we do not support Agricultural Services being included in an Office of Business Services as this outcome would be very similar to the organizational structure we currently have in the DED.

We believe the Office of Agriculture should include all of the components, staff, and services for agriculture including specific mandates to enhance the agricultural economy. The Office of Agriculture will obviously work with the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Corporation to provide progress reports on the agricultural programs and initiatives. If you do not support the Office of Agriculture enhancing the agricultural economy, we respectfully request that an agricultural representative must be appointed to the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Corporation. Without this agricultural representative, the Board of Directors will not be familiar with needs of the agricultural community and the farmer's message will be lost in the very broad mission of the Corporation.

The Office of Agriculture will need sufficient financial resources to be effective as a separate Executive agency. These resources include funds for programs, and financial and administrative staff responsible for budgeting, finance, procurement and other administrative functions that will support the office as the County is doing now. It is important to consider that transferring the existing staff from the Department's Agricultural Services Division to an Office of Agriculture, does not mean it can function effectively as a separate office. It is particularly important to understand that certain program and administrative support staff are currently in place within the Department of Economic Development and will no longer provide these administrative functions to staff in the Office of Agriculture.

Council member Elrich was concerned about the functions of the small business navigator getting lost in the broad mission of the Economic Development Corporation. We share this concern and think it also applies to agriculture. The vacant Agricultural Services Navigator position should be filled and the position should be located within the Office of Agriculture to help fulfil the mandates for enhancing the agricultural economy


and for providing technical assistance on the programs and services offered by the Office of Agriculture.

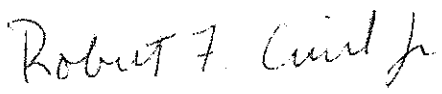
We believe the Bill should read-the Agricultural Advisory Committee-AAC must confer with the Office of Agriculture before they advise the County Executive and County Council. The AAC will copy the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Corporation on all correspondence to make sure they are aware of the agricultural issues and recommendations of the AAC.


Thank you for this opportunity to answer your questions on the Bill 25-15 and we would be happy to answer any additional questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

President, Montgomery County Farm Bureau-MCFB


Chairman, Agricultural Advisory Committee-AAC


Chairman, Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-APAB


Board Member, Montgomery Agricultural Producers-MAP