



## Michigan Association of Conservation Districts

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### Senate Agriculture Committee Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program

Chairman Daley and Members of Subcommittee:

For decades, Michigan's Conservation Districts have used the technical and programmatic tools available to advise and assist local landowners in all 83 counties to protect our productive soils, priceless fresh water, valuable forests, exceptional wildlife and outstanding air quality.

As President of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, representing all 75 of our member Districts, I want to express our full support for the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). This program is a significant tool for Conservation Districts to use in working with landowners to plan and install conservation practices that will protect our State's fresh water resources. Tools like MAEAP allow Michigan's Conservation Districts to play a vital role in helping Michigan to live up to its National and International commitments to reduce nutrient loading from nonpoint source pollution.

While MACD supports this important investment by the State to conserve our fresh water resources, it is also timely and imperative to remind our Legislators and Governor that Michigan's Conservation Districts have not received State level base operations funding since 2009. Yet funding from the State represents an important and crucially needed investment into Michigan's private lands conservation delivery system.

As much as we may deeply wish to do so, Michigan's Conservation Districts do not have the operational resources to continue taking the lead in implementing important programs like MAEAP – and leverage the many millions of dollars in Federal funds for Michigan – without a reasonable level of State investment in the form of base operations funding for our Districts. Make no mistake: some of our Districts are struggling due to chronic underfunding, yet are still out fighting the good fight *every day* with local landowners and communities to serve and conserve their natural resources. We are dedicated as ever, but this is clearly not the ideal operational dynamic for supporting and protecting Michigan's precious natural resources.

The MAEAP program, like the *many* other state and federal programs that Michigan Conservation Districts deliver, depends upon locally delivered outreach and technical assistance. Districts throughout the State are on the front lines, working locally with land owners to engage in the program and technical assistance throughout the process to MAEAP verification and beyond. Our technicians work hand-in-hand with land owners to seek financial assistance through USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to implement practices that enable MAEAP verification. Our Districts use the MAEAP tool to address nonpoint source pollution that is of utmost importance to our State.

In closing, I ask, on behalf of Michigan's 75 Conservation Districts, that the committee continues to support MAEAP and work with us to obtain State funding for our Districts. The lack of support for the past 10 years has been a major impediment to the implementation of essential conservation practices on private lands in the State of Michigan.

Sincerely,

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