SUPPORT SB704 and HB1422
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan initiatives; nutrient management plans.
Senator Monty Mason/Delegate Plum

Reasons to support Senate Bill 704 and House Bill 1422

1. **Blueprint compliance.** Fully implementing Virginia’s Clean Water Blueprint will restore the Commonwealth’s streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. The agricultural sector has made progress, but we need to accelerate agriculture’s efforts tenfold to achieve Virginia’s Blueprint goals. Two of the most important initiatives outlined in the Blueprint to reduce pollution from agriculture are fencing cattle from perennial streams and ensuring farms operate under a nutrient management plan (NMP).

2. **Pollution reductions.** Together, stream fencing and NMP implementation as prescribed in these two bills would address over 75% of agricultural lands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and would substantially reduce polluted runoff from reaching our waterways.

3. **Cost-effective.** NMP implementation and cattle fencing are two of the most cost-effective approaches to improving water quality. Nutrient management plans benefit producers by minimizing fertilizer costs and maximizing yields while cattle fencing improves herd health by ensuring cleaner water and reducing exposure to diseases like mastitis.

4. **Flexibility.** These bills incorporate significant flexibility to assist farm operators in keeping cattle out of streams. Temporary and portable fencing, as well as other “physical means” of keeping cattle out of streams are allowed and should address most farm operations, including those on leased lands. Designated stream crossings are also allowed.

5. **Costs.** The Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program pays some or, in some cases, all the costs of erecting fencing and alternative watering systems. To assist producers in meeting upfront costs, the Agricultural Best Management Practice Loan Program provides loans and grants.

6. **No violation.** Farm operators who have applied for, but have not received, VACS cost-share funding to pay for implementing a NMP or for installing stream fencing systems will not be found in violation. Farm operators whose previously-installed fencing is damaged or destroyed by storms, acts of God or actions of third parties will also not be found in violation.

7. **Possible 2025 repeal.** The bills provide for a review for possible repeal depending on progress toward meeting Bay goals for fencing and NMP implementation.

Overview
Virginia released its final Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP 3) during the summer of 2019. This plan outlined initiatives that if fully implemented will result in healthier rivers and streams and a restored Chesapeake Bay. House Bill 1422 (Plum) and Senate Bill 704 (Mason) set deadlines for fencing cattle from perennial streams and for implementing Nutrient Management Plans on cropland. This bill requires operators with more than 20 cows to fence them out of waterways; it requires operators of 50 cropland acres or more to implement a nutrient management plan.