

## Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts

### Testimony Supporting HB 1901

Submitted by:

Brenda Shambaugh, Executive Director PA  
Association of Conservation Districts

John Dryzal, Manager Cambria County Conservation  
District

Christopher Thompson, Managing Director Lancaster  
County Conservation District

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Good Morning. I am Brenda Shambaugh, Executive Director of the PA Association of Conservation Districts (PACD), representing all 66 conservation districts in the Commonwealth. Thank you for the opportunity to show our support of HB 1901. With me is John Dryzal, Cambria County Conservation District manager, and Christopher Thompson, Lancaster County Conservation District Managing Director.

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs. Districts work with landowners and local governments to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands. Each Conservation District is led by a Board of Directors comprised of local people from all walks of life, including members of the agricultural community.

Conservation districts already have a long-standing relationship with their county's landowners and specifically with their local farmers. They offer technical assistance and educational guidance to landowners and the agricultural community, which is why PACD strongly supports legislation dedicating funding for the implementation of conservation practices on land. Districts are in a unique position to assist with conservation planning, project development and installation to ensure critical conservation practices are put in place enhancing and protecting PA's natural resources.

PACD endorses HB 1901 because we believe the legislation allows for the opportunity to pilot a number of programs geared toward putting much needed Best Management Practices (BMPs) on the ground, thus reducing the amount of nutrients getting into Pennsylvania's ground and surface water.

HB 1901 is fashioned after the PA Dirt and Gravel Roads program, allowing conservation district to assess the proposed projects in their local area to best utilize our limited financial resources..."getting the best bang for the buck so to speak." As such, the legislation is essentially a return on an investment to protect our valuable natural resources. Additionally, the legislation provides conservation districts with funding to administer the program and provide the technical assistance necessary for a successful program. We strongly support the provision in the legislation allowing districts to use 12% of the funding to administer the program along with the provision allowing the State Conservation Commission 4% of the funding to administer the program. Conservation districts need the staff complement to provide the technical assistance necessary to plan and develop BMPs.

Clean water is vital to all Pennsylvanians and HB 1901 provides a mechanism to utilize federal dollars in a variety of programs. Our hope is that the PA passes this legislation, but also considers future state funding opportunities to continue the programs established in HB 1901 when federal stimulus money is exhausted.



Good Morning. I am John Dryzal, manager of the Cambria County Conservation District. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity for Conservation Districts to provide comments in support of HB 1901.

As you probably know, conservation districts are county-based agencies that work with constituents at the local county level.

Collectively across the Commonwealth we provide the local leadership, education, technical assistance and implement programs and projects through collaborative partnerships to address a variety of natural resource and conservation issues.

Our conservation district endorses HB1901. This legislation will provide another avenue of funding to address and implement water quality improvement and nutrient reduction projects in our community.

HB 1901 would effectively provide additional resources to my District that will enable us to directly address critical issues and move toward meeting objectives identified in our strategic plan. Some of these critical issues include: water quality improvements, acid mine drainage remediation, coal refuse pile removal, riparian buffer implementation and supporting farmers to establish best management practices for water quality protection and nutrient reduction.

A couple examples of these objectives include: “Increasing the number of stream restoration best management practices (BMPs) installed in critical or sensitive water quality areas”, and “conducting comprehensive farm operation evaluations to identify needs, discuss best management practice options, funding options and option for service providers....”

As Brenda mentioned, this bill establishes a means to get the funding resources to the local level through the State Conservation Commission in a similar way that conservation districts receive funds through the Dirt Gravel and Low Volume Roads Program.

Projects funded through the Dirt Gravel and Low Volume Road program are widely successful for a few key reasons. First, projects are selected by local people with local knowledge that determine where to best utilize the limited financial resources. Local involvement is critical in obtaining landowner participation in any program and especially critical when finding property owners willing to implement projects on their personal property.

Another key reason is having funding on hand to immediately implement projects. My district has had the most success implementing projects, especially projects on farms, when we have had funding in hand and available locally. People are always busy. Once a landowner is agreeable to a project, they are ready to get it done. Delays in obtaining



funds through grants and other resources allows time for conditions to change. By the time grant applications are submitted, reviewed, awarded and contracted, the landowner may no longer be in a position or willing to move forward with the project.

A final key is having the funding resources available to administer the program. Projects only get done when someone is making sure that they are getting done. The language allowing conservation districts to use 12% of the funding to administer the program is a must. We strongly support this provision and commend the sponsors for having the fore thought to include it in the bill.

In conclusion, we thank the legislature for considering utilizing some of the federal stimulus money toward improving and protecting the Commonwealth's natural resources. We further hope that this is just the beginning of a great program and that progress will continue toward obtaining dedicated funding for the purposes outlined in this bill. Again, we support HB1901 and look forward to the bill progressing through the legislature.



Good morning Committee members and the many partners and friends of the County Conservation Districts. I am Chris Thompson, Managing Director of the Lancaster County Conservation District. I am here today to underscore Lancaster's, as well as all 66 Conservation Districts across the state, support for House Bill 1901.

As Brenda mentioned, this legislation provides support for several new and existing state programs and environmental initiatives that have a beneficial impact on our local farmers, our municipalities and private businesses.

Brenda and others today have detailed how this bill would provide funding for ACAP, the new Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program, to help farmers get management practices on the ground. These BMPs help not only to improve the farms so future generations can be successful, but the practices also help improve the health and quality of our local streams, creeks and rivers.

We are also encouraged by House Bill 1901 because it provides additional support to existing state programs that have been underfunded for many years. Specifically, this legislation provides funding for Act 38, Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Program and PENNVEST, Pennsylvania's Infrastructure Investment Authority.

Pennvest is known for providing low-interest loans and grants for new construction or for improvements to publicly or privately-owned drinking water, stormwater or sewage treatment facilities. They also have an important role in helping the Ag community through their funding support of agricultural non-point source projects. The projects can include structural and management improvements such as manure storage facilities, riparian buffers, barnyard runoff reduction and various other practices that demonstrate cost-effective nutrients reduction benefits that all help protect and improve the waters of our commonwealth.

More critical to Conservation Districts is that HB 1901 provides additional support to the State's Nutrient Management Program. Pennsylvania was among the first state in the nation to establish specific nutrient management planning requirements through law and regulation. The Nutrient Management Program, administered by the State Conservation Commission and delegated to 57 of our 67 counties regulates the proper management of manure, manure odors and manure application setbacks from bodies of water. Funding through this program has not adequately provided the funding to cover the cost associated with administering this important program in our counties.

In the 2019-2020 state budget there was a slight increase in PDA's budget to administer the program, but that still does not cover the cost and districts are forced to "borrow" from other programs or our respective county to cover the shortfall. To illustrate this issue, I'll ask you to review the attached chart showing the current expenses, revenues



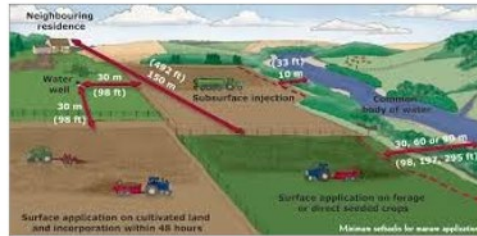
and shortfall we are experiencing in Lancaster County.

Your support for HB 1901 is a significant step forward to show Pennsylvania cares about our farms and our farmers, about cleaning up our local waters and about providing support to the many organizations that work tirelessly to achieve these goals.

# Lancaster County Conservation District



Program	Reimbursement Rate per Position/ Total	Salary & Benefits Combined	Administrative Assistance & Oversight	Assigned Overhead Costs \$9,093ea	Total Cost for the District to Administer Program	Program Funding Deficit
Nutrient Management (8 Positions)	\$60,000/ \$480,000	\$342,854 <u>\$ 89,481</u> \$432,305	\$61,099	\$72,749	\$566,153	-\$86,153



In conclusion, PACD is excited about the possibility of a statewide program to fund BMPs and assist landowners. The ultimate goal is to provide the technical assistance and the funding to implement practices necessary to reduce nutrient runoff into our streams and waterways. HB 1901 provide both, and we urge the PA General Assembly to pass them and for the Governor to sign them into law.

