

May 5, 2021

Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

We are writing today to discuss the impact of HB 4603, which would amend the Open Meetings Act to give agricultural commodity groups the flexibility to meet remotely.

Given the unique demands of our industry, remote meetings will make these boards more accessible and transparent for the stakeholders they represent. Each of the commodity organizations represents growers across the state of Michigan, not just in one locality. For many farmers, that means having to drive two to three hours each way to attend a meeting of the commodity organization. This is not always feasible, especially during sensitive times like planting and harvest.

The commodity organizations have had the opportunity to test the impact of remote meetings over the course of the pandemic and have found that remote meetings have increased participation from stakeholders, members of the public interested in sections of the commodity group business, and subject matter experts. Whether it was educational meetings or official board meetings, we saw increased participation from board members, farmer stakeholders, the general public, and subject matter experts that traditionally would not have been able to attend an in-person meeting. The commodity groups have also demonstrated that they are able to consistently hold these meetings virtually while complying with all the other requirements of the Open Meetings Act.

Lastly, the organizations covered by this bill are funded and directed by the industries they represent, not by taxpayers. The boards are made up of voluntary appointed members who are not elected, and who make decisions about how to invest industry dollars to benefit each commodity. The topics discussed at these meetings are specific to the industry, and include agricultural research, market development and education.

Please feel free to contact any of our organizations if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Jim Zook, Corn Marketing Program of Michigan

Greg Bird, Michigan Onion Committee

Janna Fritz, Michigan Soybean Committee

David Girton, Michigan Cattlemen's Association

Kelly Turner, Michigan Potato Industry Commission

Joe Cramer, Michigan Bean Commission

Julie Gordon, Michigan Cherry Committee

John Baker, Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board, Michigan Carrot Committee

Diane Smith, Michigan Apple Association

Kevin Robson, Michigan Blueberry Commission

Jody Pollok-Newsom, Michigan Wheat Program