

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE FISCAL NOTE

BILL NO. Senate Bill 634

PRINTER NO. 995

AMOUNT

No Fiscal Impact

FUND

General Fund

DATE INTRODUCED

May 13, 2019

PRIME SPONSOR

Senator Yaw

DESCRIPTION

Senate Bill 634 amends Title 3 (Agriculture) establishing the Conservation Excellence Grant Program under the State Conservation Commission (commission) to provide technical and financial assistance to farmers and landowners for the implementation of best management practice projects.

The legislation provides for the commission to establish guidelines for the approval of applications from eligible projects and award grants to applicants for projects that the commission determines will further the purpose of the program. It provides that projects are to be certified by a registered engineer, technical service provider, staff from a conservation district, the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) or any other person with training and expertise approved by the commission.

In addition, the legislation provides that the commission shall give priority to approving applications based upon the following criteria and this order:

- Priority locations:
 - Tier 1 Chesapeake Bay counties;
 - Tier 2 and 3 Chesapeake Bay counties; and
 - All other counties.

- Priority practices:
 - Livestock exclusion fencing;
 - Stream-side buffers;
 - Streambank restoration;
 - Barnyard and feedlot runoff abatement;
 - Stream crossings;
 - Off-stream watering;
 - Manure storage facilities;
 - Nutrient management plans and manure management plans;
 - Agricultural erosion and sedimentation plans; and
 - Any other priority practices approved by the commission.

- The level and extent of planning and technical assistance necessary;
- Applicant's willingness to supply nongovernmental matching funds; and
- Any other criteria adopted by the commission.

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The bill defines *best management practice* as “a practice or combination of practices determined by the commission or the USDA-NRCS to be effective and practical, considering technological, economic and institutional factors, to manage nutrients and sediment to protect surface water and groundwater.”

The legislation is scheduled to take effect in 60 days.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The enactment of Senate Bill 634 will have no fiscal impact on Commonwealth funds. Funding for the Conservation Excellence Grant Program established in the legislation will be dependent upon appropriations made by the General Assembly through the annual General Appropriations Act.