Senator Brown offered the following concurrent resolution:

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 22

A concurrent resolution to express support for the continuation of the Department of Agriculture as a distinct department within state government.

Whereas, Agriculture is Michigan's second-largest industry. Agriculture generates more than $70 billion of economic impact annually, employs more than 1 million people, and is one of the few growing and economically-dependable sectors of Michigan's battered economy; and

Whereas, Michigan's farms, farmlands, orchards, and nurseries produce more than 200 commercial commodities--second only to California in the diversity of its agricultural production--and leads the nation in the production of tart cherries, blueberries, squash, dry black beans, and nine other commodities; and

Whereas, For more than 88 years, the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) has supported and facilitated the economic expansion of Michigan's agricultural industry and ensured an abundant and safe food supply for all Michigan residents. The MDA is home to experts who understand the complexities of our highly specialized and complex agricultural industry and who have earned the trust of various stakeholders. It has fostered relationships with producers, processors, researchers, and other industry professionals by collaboratively resolving problems for the good of the state, its residents, and the industry; and

Whereas, Beyond agriculture, agricultural production, food safety, conservation, and environmental roles, the MDA assumes many consumer protection responsibilities. The MDA works actively with the restaurant industry, gas stations, grocery stores, and other retailers making sure products sold and purchased by consumers are both safe and what they are advertised to be; and

Whereas, The people of the state of Michigan need and deserve an agency whose first priority is to ensure food safety and provide solutions for the complex issues in the food production system; and

Whereas, Any proposal to merge the MDA with another state department or dissolve the MDA would result in no short- or long-term gain for Michigan. Careful review of MDA programs shows that the department is extremely efficient, and other state departments should use MDA as a model for how efficiencies can be achieved. Michigan would be the only state with significant agricultural activity without an independent and focused agriculture department; and

Whereas, As our political and economic landscape will continue to change, a stable agriculture department is vital to maintain focus on food and agricultural issues and to ensure continued support for fundamental food safety and consumer protection programs; and

Whereas, The MDA has already absorbed a nearly 50 percent cut in general fund appropriations over the last decade. It is a credit to the department and its dedicated staff that, despite these cuts, the MDA has been able to maintain its high level of service, address new challenges to the food and agricultural industry, and facilitate growth of the industry in Michigan while not sacrificing food safety, conservation, or the environment; and

Whereas, As the manufacturing sector tries to recover, now is not the time to risk diluting the effectiveness of current MDA programs and place Michigan's agricultural industry at a potential disadvantage with other states; and

Whereas, We should recognize the behavior and tradition of problem-solving at MDA and encourage other state agencies to achieve that same level of excellence and accountability rather than increase inefficiencies and create impediments by merely merging departments; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That we express support for the Michigan Department of Agriculture remaining a distinct department within state government; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor.