



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

SB 493

Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2021

Date: March 3, 2021

Position: Support with Amendments

To: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

From: Josh Kurtz, Maryland Executive Director

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 493 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This legislation would delay repayment of transfer tax funds to Program Open Space and remove a General Fund appropriation into the Fisheries Research and Development Fund. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) understands the difficulties the state is facing due to COVID response and related needs. We support that effort while respectfully requesting that funding for the transfer tax repayment and Fisheries Research and Development Fund continue to support these ongoing functions.

Land conservation programs support preservation and maintenance of green spaces critical to protecting the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and supporting the Bay ecosystem.

Revenue from the Transfer Tax funds preservation of natural areas, agricultural areas and historical assets through Program Open Space. Since the inception of the Program over \$1 billion in funding has been diverted to the General Fund to assist the state in balancing the budget during economic difficulties.

Maryland now lags its own conservation and preservation goals, and when funding is diverted, county and municipal governments may lack a mode for maintaining green space for use by residents. Open spaces serve as a natural water filter, balancing the run-off from more developed areas. Diversions for one year have been commonly seen in the past but the DLS recommendation to strike the repayment of \$242.2M would set a dangerous new precedent.

The Fisheries Research and Development Fund is critical to timely and responsible management of the fishery resources in Maryland.

Responsible management of the Chesapeake Bay fisheries is critical to the health of the Bay and local economies that rely on those fisheries. The Fisheries Research and Development Fund contributes to several key functions for successful fishery management, including: enforcement of fisheries management rules, habitat preservation and restoration, water quality monitoring, benthic habitat surveys, prioritization of critical habitats, legal issues, and licensing services.

Decisions about Maryland's fishery rely on the best available data and are timely in nature and removing funding for fisheries research and development could delay in development of timely data collection, such as the oyster stock assessment.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS report on SB 493. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

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