

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 103
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3578 · 301-858-3578
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578
Fax 410-841-3156 · 301-858-3156
Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 21, 2021

Testimony in Favor of SB0324
Environment and Natural Resources - Complaints, Inspections, and Enforcement -
Information Maintenance and Reporting

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 324, legislation which will ensure that environmental advocates and Marylanders have access to all necessary data from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Department of the Environment (MDE) to better advocate for the health and safety of our communities.

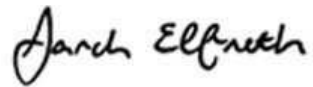
Last session this Committee heard and passed a much stronger version of this bill, [Senate Bill 460](#) (2020 Session), that would have created an Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman to provide additional oversight, investigatory support, and communications assistance for our State Agencies and the public related to our environmental and conservation laws. In my testimony last year I discussed the thousands of jobs that have been abolished in DNR and MDE and how this staffing shortage has been detrimental to the ability of these Departments to properly function - specifically their enforcement capabilities. As this Committee knows too well, when these Departments are not able to properly enforce our laws, our environment suffers: our WIP goals are not met, our waterways are suffocated with sediment, and our conservation laws are not enforced to the fullest extent possible.

A year later, this staffing shortage remains true. I am confident this new legislation and approach will still ensure all the necessary data is publicly available in order to recognize where enforcement challenges remain. In doing so, SB 324 will allow the public to have a co-equal role in the enforcement of our laws to help alleviate the pressure from these staffing shortages.

Additionally, this will be a cost-saving measure for the Departments as it will allow the Departments to save valuable time and resources by not having to fulfill the many Public Information Act requests they receive by requiring them to proactively place basic, non-confidential public information, online.

If we cannot enforce our environmental and conservation laws to the fullest extent possible, then we must ensure that the public has the ability to properly advocate on behalf of our citizens - this bill does just that. Once again I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 324.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Elfreth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and 'E'.

Sarah Elfreth