



**House Bill 708 Comprehensive Climate Solutions  
(Delegates Barve and Stein) –  
Written Testimony**

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**Date: March 4, 2022**

**Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Submitted to: House Economic Matters Committee

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The Comprehensive Climate Solutions Act includes several components, one of which is to establish a Maryland Climate Justice Corps to be administered by the Chesapeake Bay Trust in a manner very similar to the Chesapeake Conservation Corps created by the General Assembly in 2010.

Because the Trust already administers a very similar Corps program whose members perform a significant amount of climate-related work, the Trust will be able to administer this sister Climate Corps program in a very cost-effective, efficient way that reduces financial burden. The Trust is an independent state agency established by the General Assembly for this very purpose – to reach and support local groups on the ground.

You may know us as a grant-maker who sends resources to not-for-profits in your communities, and we have made grants in every district in Maryland. Some of these grants are related to the Chesapeake Conservation Corps, whose members have also helped not-for-profit host organizations (both environmental and non-environmental) throughout Maryland.

The Trust, therefore, supports the Climate Corps component of the bill, with two amendments:

- 1) one minor amendment to streamline administration, further reduce overhead cost, and optimize taking advantage of some of the infrastructure already in place to administer the Chesapeake Conservation Corps because the two programs are so similar (e.g., expanding an existing Corps Advisory Board, rather than creating a second Corps Advisory Board),
- 2) one amendment to articulate the source and level of funding for the Climate Corps (general fund) since the Trust does not receive a direct appropriation to support its work but rather operates on partnerships and voluntary non-state funds.

**Background on the Chesapeake Conservation Corps on which the Climate Corps is modeled**

The language in the bill creating the Maryland Climate Justice Corps (new code sections 8-19297-1938 in SB 528) is modeled on the statutory language creating Chesapeake Conservation Corps (existing code sections 8-1913-1924). As a result, the Trust will be able to seamlessly create the



new Climate Corps with minimal additional administration/overhead. The Climate Corps will be able to take advantage of structural elements of the Conservation Corps, which annually places 30-40 young people in year-long, stipend-supported terms of service at host not-for-profit entities across the region. The young people in both Corps will/do 1) work on a project to advance their Host Organizations' missions in the realms of infrastructure, watershed restoration, energy conservation, agriculture, and K-12 education (expanding their Host Organizations' capacity), 2) receive life and career skills training, and 3) learn to lead their own independent projects (including developing budgets and managing grants). Host Organizations include environmental and non-environmental entities (e.g., faith institutions, local governments, school systems, civic associations with social missions, etc.) alike.



The Chesapeake Conservation Corps already hosts many members who work on climate-related topics: K-12 climate education, shoreline and coastal resiliency, tree planting and forest management, energy efficiency projects, infrastructure projects, and more. Demand for the Chesapeake Conservation Corps far exceeds available resources: Each year we can support 35-40 member-host placements, but generally close to 100 prospective members apply and 70-80 not-for-profits organizations vie to serve as hosts for one or more members. The new Climate Corps, therefore, will be able to be efficiently initiated and populated.

In addition, we expect similar success of the Climate Corps to its existing sister Conservation Corps. In its first 12 years, 318 alums have completed the Conservation Corps program. Thirty percent of Corps members are immediately hired by their Host Organizations or another host in the program, many into new jobs that were made possible by the expanded capacity at the Host Organization driven by the Corps member's service. Hundreds of organizations have served as Host Organizations, many of which expanded in size during this period and have filled their staffs with Corps alums. Diversity of Corps members is an important focus for the Trust: We are continuously working on new strategies to ensure strong diversity, including recent trial of a needs-based stipend increase and the hiring of a new staff position who will focus in part on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues for the Corps.

## **About the Chesapeake Bay Trust**

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a non-profit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and citizen engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work numbers of groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based and reach large institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting on average 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$130 million through more than 12,000 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985. We make 350-400 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation, instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland's online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for more than two decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenets in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues, and that theme characterizes the Chesapeake Conservation Corps. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources. Three under-engaged audiences of particular focus identified by our Diversity and Inclusion Committee are the faith-based sector, communities of color, and the human health sector. The Trust has seen much success: The number of students, volunteers, and teachers of color engaged in our grants match the demographics of Maryland. Close to 10% of our grants supported work at faith-based institutions of 13 different religions.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the Committee. If you should have any questions regarding the Trust's testimony, please contact us at 410-974-2941 x100 or [jdavis@cbtrust.org](mailto:jdavis@cbtrust.org).