



March 4, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman and members of the committee, on behalf of Anne Arundel County and in concert with the Maryland Association of Counties, I am testifying in support of SB 969, the Whole Watershed Act. Over the last year or so, the sponsors of this bill have thoughtfully engaged stakeholders from across the environmental advocacy, research, and implementation spectrum to devise legislation that created some reasonable, additional guardrails for the industry, but perhaps more importantly, seeks to accelerate the restoration of the Chesapeake and its tributaries.

As you probably already know, despite its Herculean efforts, and dramatic improvements in wastewater sector discharges, Maryland and several other Bay states are still behind on achieving their 2025 Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) goals. That said, over the last decade, Maryland has made incredible progress reducing pollution to its local waterways, and has nurtured a restoration industry that has become a national leader in the space. Now is not the time to throw any hurdles in the way of that momentum.


This legislation creates additional financial incentives for local governments, non-profits, and other implementation entities to execute thoughtful, multi-benefit projects that are consistent with the Bay Program's recent CESR (Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response) report which recommends:

“A greater emphasis could be focused on shallow areas of the Bay — places where improvements would likely be seen more quickly and that serve as more important habitats for fish and other aquatic life. Those nutrient reduction efforts should be paired with other projects to improve habitats in those areas”

The reality is, this already is, and has been, where counties throughout Maryland have been operating for over a decade now, focused on local efforts that ultimately aim to improve the health of the Potomac, the Patuxent, the Severn, the Choptank, and other tributaries to the Chesapeake. And it's where we'll continue to focus as long as the State allows us to continue that work in a cost-effective and timely fashion.

Counties are currently working with MDE and other stakeholders to refine an amendment that improves public engagement in these projects and which codifies some of the administrative protections the agency already has in place. We look forward to continuing to work with the State and the bill sponsors to advance a bill that retains Maryland's leadership role in river and Bay recovery. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erik A. Michelsen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Erik Michelsen
Deputy Director
Bureau of Watershed Protection & Restoration