



**Testimony to The SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**SB 969 - Stream and Watershed Restoration – Stream Restoration Contractor Licensing and Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Restoration and Funding (Whole Watershed Act)**

**POSITION: Support**

**By: Linda T. Kohn, President**

**Date: March 5, 2024**

Since the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1970's, the League of Women Voters has advocated for policies that protect our planet and promote public health. The League believes that water quality is essential for both public and environmental health, and advocates for protecting and improving our water resources.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **supports SB 969, the Whole Watershed Act**, which would establish a pilot program to take a comprehensive, cooperative, and coordinated approach to identify and repair five impaired watersheds in Maryland. This program would bring all relevant stakeholders to the table in order to accelerate the restoration of impaired watersheds.

Watersheds are interconnected ecosystems, with each component impacting the health and functioning of the whole. Importantly, **SB 969** focuses on maximizing the co-benefits of watershed restoration, like improvements in public health. Low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the public health effects of impaired water quality. **SB 969** would prioritize watershed restoration in communities that experience Environmental Injustice.

**The Whole Watershed Act** would also establish the Stream Restoration Contractors Licensing Board. This would bolster accountability by ensuring that all contractors working on stream restoration are qualified to do so.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **strongly urges a favorable report on SB 969.**