

Testimony before the
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 5, 2024

Senate Bill 969
Position: **FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, request a **FAVORABLE report on SB 969**, the Whole Watershed Act. This bill will take several important steps to better align public resources with environmental outcomes and promote innovative partnerships.

In 2023, the Science and Technical Advisory Committee to the Chesapeake Bay Program released a report titled Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response, better known as CESR. CESR recommends a focus of investments on smaller geographies more likely to be responsive to restoration efforts in a shorter amount of time as well as providing multiple ecosystem benefits beyond water quality that are supported by the communities in which projects are located. Doing so will require a new approach and a focus of existing funding sources to bring about this result.

This is exactly what the Whole Watershed Act does. Under the guidance of a State Management Team that brings together relevant stakeholders and permitting entities, projects in five selected watersheds will be coordinated to produce maximum ecological impact, measurable co-benefits, and demonstrate an alternative to Maryland's current approach to "random acts of restoration". The bill also seeks to adapt this approach to different types of watersheds in rural, suburban, and urban areas with their own unique challenges and opportunities.

Finally, the bill will help ensure quality and high standards of design and construction in restoration projects by creating a new licensing board for the people and entities that provide stream restoration services. This is a proven model to ensure practitioners have the requisite knowledge to construct projects in ways that minimize environmental impacts.

Accelerating the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries requires innovative ideas and coordinated efforts. The Whole Watershed Act takes many of the key recommendations of the CESR report and applies them toward a new and exciting model for waterway improvement.

For these reasons, we request a **FAVORABLE report on SB 969**.

Sincerely,

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