

Committee: Environment, Energy, and Transportation
Testimony: Department of the Environment – Fees, Penalties, Funding, and Regulation (HB 245)
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 26, 2024

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Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund

On behalf of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund, we strongly support (HB 245), which grants the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) the authority to adjust different fees associated with the programs and services it offers, and request a favorable finding. Given the onset of fiscal instability in the state, it becomes crucial to assess MDE's fees in a manner that ensures both environmental and fiscal sustainability. This legislation tackles the evolving dynamics faced by the MDE, empowering them with increased resources to enhance their effectiveness in carrying out their duties and also enables the addition of essential staff to ensure proper oversight of industries and activities that may negatively impact the environment and our waterways.

HB 245 broadens the scope of activities eligible for funding under the Maryland Clean Air Fund. This proactive measure enables strategic investments in initiatives aimed at reducing air pollution within our state, fostering cleaner air and healthier communities. The bill includes a provision to prevent funds deposited into the Maryland Clean Air Fund from reverting to the General Fund. This safeguard is essential for maintaining the fund's effectiveness and ensuring that resources allocated for environmental protection remain dedicated to their intended purpose.

HB 245 establishes the Private Dam Repair Fund, dedicated to financing the repair, enhancement, or removal of private dams. This proactive step enhances public safety and protects our waterways by addressing urgent infrastructure needs and mitigating the risks associated with dam failures.

The legislation also includes provisions aimed at establishing fees, administering loans, and enforcing penalties in a manner that fosters accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. By directing resources towards targeted programs and initiatives, HB 245 ensures that our environmental protection efforts are sustainable and effective.

In conclusion, HB 245 presents a significant opportunity to strengthen Maryland's environmental stewardship, safeguard public health and safety, and preserve our natural heritage for future generations. Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund urges the committee to find this vital legislation favorable.

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