

## Testimony to the **Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

SB 0969 Stream and Watershed Restoration – Stream Restoration Contractor Licensing 2 and Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Restoration and Funding 3 (Whole Watershed Act)

Act Position: Unfavorable

March 4, 2024

Dear Honorable Senator Feldman and Committee Members,

I am pleased to see bills that, by title, imply protection for our Maryland Natural Resources. As a 64 year old, life-long Maryland resident with strong appreciation for our natural spaces, this topic really matters to me. I see healthy natural spaces declining rapidly. I am also a Montgomery County Weed Warrior trained in recognizing and removing invasive species from the parks, a volunteer salt watch monitor and a Frog Watch volunteer hoping to monitor and help improve a worsening situation.

I recognize that climate change has caused an increase in the incidence of intense storms increasing the rate of erosion and this is compounded by the increase in storm runoff from ever expanding impervious surfaces due to development. I understand that the construction projects within streams to reinforce infrastructure (roads and buildings) are inevitable given the damage caused by these events. Emphasis should be on mitigation strategies out of the parks and natural spaces. Much tighter restrictions and strict oversight need to be placed on projects deemed absolutely necessary in a natural habitat.

I believe the so called “stream restorations” currently occurring within the heart of parks and natural spaces where infrastructure protection is not the motivation are doing more harm than good. These efforts bulldoze the increasingly rare natural ecosystem which evolved over centuries and is now struggling to survive pressures caused by human activity. They clear the area to construct tidy but unnatural, bolder-reinforced, above ground stormwater drains with well-intended goal of restoring the habitat to some semblance of a natural ecosystem. I am not aware of any successful efforts to do such restoration where there is not a committed force do requisite ongoing maintenance.

Small Native trees are planted as well as native understory plants and I support that activity 100%. Though invasive plants may have been apparent prior to construction, the tremendous soil disturbance and removal of canopy trees accelerates the spread of these species such that any native plants introduced are quickly overtaken in a matter of a few years. I’m not sure what survival rate is expected for the young trees planted but the rate of loss appears significant.

Once these projects are completed, I believe there is an agreement to monitor and maintain the area for 5 years. As a volunteer who spends an inordinate amount of time

attempting to control invasive plants in the parks, I have yet to see signs of effective maintenance following the implementation of these projects. Without a dedicated regular effort by TRAINED individuals, in my opinion, the characterization of maintenance is misleading even for the initial five year period.

I expect this bill as written will further facilitate and accelerate the conversion of our streams to rocky storm drains and accelerate the replacement of suitable habitat for our native species with an overgrowth of invasive plants with a minimal inconvenience and expense to those who seek the accreditation. I do believe that any stream work requires qualified individuals to understand the impact of such activity and enforce strong adherence to protective practice. I don't see that this bill can possibly facilitate that end.

Respectfully,

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