



*Forming Faithful Stewards,
Caring for Sacred Waters*

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March 5, 2024

Chairman Brian Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senate Bill 969 – Whole Watersheds Act

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members:

On behalf of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake (IPC), I write to urge your **support of Senate Bill 969**, the Impact of Environmental Permits and State Agency Actions bill.

Water is life. In all religions, water is central to sacred rituals and symbolic of renewal and interconnectedness. Waters of the Chesapeake, including the rivers and streams in our communities, are sacred, too. They are central to our communities, provide recreation, are relied upon for sustenance by some of our poorest neighbors, and are habitat for countless species and aquatic plants. We have a moral responsibility to care for these waters and ensure future generations can likewise reflect on the beauty and sacredness of these waters.

Maryland has invested billions of dollars over many decades to restore healing to these sacred waters. However, recent studies have concluded that these efforts will still fall short of water quality goals. **We need to work smarter, not harder.** Congregations over the last 10 years have installed hundreds of projects on their properties to help restore the watershed. But these “random acts of restoration” might not be having the impact they could, given grant funding limitations and uncoordinated restoration efforts at the watershed scale.

Senate Bill 969 will direct state funding toward geographically-focused coordinated efforts among a wide variety of landowners to accelerate watershed restoration efforts. Imagine a congregation installs a rain garden to reduce stormwater pollution from their property...and, also, the next door school does the same, and the neighborhood abutting the congregation does the same, and the businesses across the street as well. Suddenly, a strategic effort to address pollution at scale yields quicker improvements than that one congregation alone. **Senate Bill 969 will also prioritize efforts in environmental justice communities**, which is cornerstone in faith-based environmental advocacy.

IPC urges your FAVORABLE support of Senate Bill 969 to create a process and funding for concentrated watershed restoration efforts at the whole-watershed scale. IPC and our partners will continue to do our part to inspire the 5,000 congregations in Maryland to be good stewards of the watershed, and we ask Maryland to support this legislation that will test more strategic ways for accelerating restoration of these sacred waters. Hopefully in our lifetime, it will be **safe** to conduct sacred water rituals in actual rivers. Let’s work smarter together to achieve this dream.

Sincerely,



Jodi Rose

Executive Director

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

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