3/6/24

Testimony in SUPPORT for HB1320 -
Bay Restoration Fund – Disbursement and Use of Fund

To Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT,** for **HB1320** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Our rivers are impaired by nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, and bacteria. After 40 years of pollution reduction efforts in the Chesapeake Bay, our rivers and our communities are still falling short of the envisioned restoration goals. *The Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report* has highlighted the need to address non-point source pollution in our waterways, of which septic systems are a significant contributor. Pollution from septic systems has a great impact on local water quality in rural areas, such as the Eastern Shore. Outdated and failing septic systems leach nitrogen, phosphorus, and harmful bacteria to tidal and non-tidal waterways—causing pollution and human health concerns. **This bill will increase funding and scope of the Bay Restoration Fund (BRF) to accelerate septic *and* drain field upgrades in *both* the Critical Area and non-tidal waterways. HB1320 will:**

- Strategically increase funding to the Septic System Upgrade Program in the Bay Restoration Fund (BRF).
- Include failing systems within 1000 feet of any nitrogen impaired waterway at the same priority level as properties in the Critical Area.

Pollution from septic systems now exceeds nitrogen pollution from our wastewater treatment plants in 17 counties, including Kent and Queen Anne's County which make up the Chester River watershed. As Chester Riverkeeper, I research and collect water quality data including nitrogen, phosphorus, and fecal enterococci bacteria levels and communicate my findings to communities within my watershed. On the Chester, of the 13 sites I monitor for fecal enterococci pollution, 4 failed to meet the threshold for safe water contact *more than half of the times they were tested*. **ShoreRivers has begun tracking the sources of this bacteria pollution by** utilizing DNA testing to identify specific animal sources of this bacterial pollution—whether it be human, poultry, canine, or swine. **Results from 2022 testing indicate the overwhelming majority of DNA present in the Chester is human, making shoreline septic systems a key source to monitor in the years ahead**. ShoreRivers is a strong proponent for more policies that help to address pollution coming from septic systems. For this reason and others stated above, we urge **a favorable report from this committee, for HB1320.**

Sincerely,
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of ShoreRivers.

ShoreRivers
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