



Senate Bill 969

*Stream and Watershed Restoration - Stream Restoration Contractor Licensing and
Projects and Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Restoration and Funding
(Whole Watershed Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: March 26, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 969. This bill, among other things, establishes the Whole Watershed Restoration Partnership, shifting state policy to place more focus on whole watershed restoration projects.

As the primary operators of public infrastructure in Maryland, counties have been major stakeholders in the state's push to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and in broader environmental sustainability efforts. Counties do not act alone though, and community groups and nonprofits also play a significant role in this work. In an effort to better guide boots-on-the-ground leaders, state and federal policy makers have prioritized a menu of practices aimed at meeting certain environmental benchmarks. Currently, though, the structure of this menu and the execution of programs has led to singular one-off projects, instead of a larger coordinated effort. SB 969 is a first step toward changing that, incentivizing the breaking down of silos and encouraging all stakeholders to participate in a broader plan.

Counties support the underlying intent of SB 969 and applaud the bill sponsors for their coordination with county representatives. **MACo urges the Committee to retain the stream restoration notification and input provisions which were not adopted when the Committee passed the bills crossfile, HB 1165.** These provisions were negotiated with local government, community, and state agency stakeholders, and represent a positive step forward in easing some concerns around restoration practices.

As amended, SB 969 will be a positive first step in ensuring a cleaner and healthier Chesapeake Bay and a better Maryland. For these reasons, MACo urges the Committee to give SB 969 a **FAVORABLE** report.