

# HB0729 Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024

written testimony in favor of HB0729

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Vernal Pools are important for many reasons as stated here today. In addition to all the previously mentioned reasons, **Vernal Pools are an important natural resource to humans and are available to all communities regardless of native language, income, or education level.**

- Rates of depression and anxiety among adults, teens and children are high
- Spending time outside/in nature is one proven way to combat feelings of anxiety and depression (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8125471/>)
- Observing the organisms that exist in the natural ecosystems around us is a kind of experience that can delight and amaze and stay with you for hours and days

As a water monitoring coordinator and someone whose job is to help interpret the natural environment, I can tell you that few things affect people as much as showing them what animals coexist nearby. I've had adults and children alike express surprise at the wide and diverse fauna found under a rock in a stream, just below the surface of the water. "I had no idea this whole world existed under here" is a common refrain or just 'wow'. Once I've shown families the underwater organisms that live in streams and natural pools, I've had people change their beliefs, habits and behaviors.

Vernal Pools are an especially unique habitat to be able to explore and connect to because

- they occur in a wide variety of places across Maryland
- they can be accessible in a way that some natural waterbodies are not, they can be found deep in the forest or in a backyard or along a walking trail
- Chances are you live or pass near one, whether you know it or not.
- You don't have to travel to the eastern shore (like the ocean) or western Maryland to experience them.
- You don't have to fly to the Caribbean or go on safari to see some amazing animals. For example, you might see an 8 to 10 inch long salamander with bright yellow spots called a Spotted Salamander. They live underground almost all year long and they need vernal pools to breed and lay eggs.

Vernal pools are found in neighborhoods and parks in Maryland. You do not need big travel budget or advanced education to visit and appreciate the allure of vernal pools and the critters that need them to survive.

**Vernal pools are an opportunity to use our backyards and parks to connect with nature. They are an opportunity to see and protect an ecosystem that doesn't get much attention, but is accessible to all. They are an opportunity for kids from communities all**

**over Maryland to experience the joy of connection to their outdoor world.** I encourage you to protect them by voting in favor of the Vernal Pool Wetland Protection Act.