



HB729

Department of the Environment - Nontidal Wetlands - Protection of Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024)

Testimony before the Environment and Transportation Committee

Hearing February 21, 2024

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Korman and Vice-Chair Boyce, and members of the committee, my name is Peter Alexander, and I represent the 700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of HB729**, which would establish protection for vernal pools through regulations set by the MDE. We appreciate the leadership of Delegate Hill and her colleagues in sponsoring this legislation.

Vernal pools are unique, seasonally transient wetland ecosystems that support species biodiversity and important ecosystem functions including replenishing ground water and filtering storm water. Typically filled from early Winter through mid-Summer, these pools are essential habitat for fairy shrimp, wood frogs, and mole salamanders, including Maryland's endangered Tiger Salamander.

In Maryland as elsewhere, vernal pools are often small and overlooked, and are rapidly being lost due to oversight and poor land management practices. Many vernal pools do not meet the current MDE wetland or federal Clean Water Act protection criteria although several Mid-Atlantic and New England states have implemented legal protections or certification programs to preserve them

HB729 will designate vernal pools as named wetlands in MDE regulations, and along with a 100-foot buffer zone, protect amphibian habitat from mismanagement. HB729 also requires MDE prepare a plan for notifying the public of the location of vernal pools and other wetlands.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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