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## Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1320 – Bay Restoration – Disbursement and Use of Funds

Environment and Transportation Committee  
March 6, 2024

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF HB1320**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

The Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report has highlighted the need to address non-point source pollution in our waterways. A conventional septic system does not remove much nitrogen, instead delivering about 23.2 pounds of nitrogen per year to groundwater. Even Best Available Technology (BAT) systems only reduce nitrogen loading to about half that of a conventional system. Comparatively, wastewater treatment plants with enhanced nutrient removal can discharge effluent containing less than 3 milligrams per liter of nitrogen. **Pollution from septic systems now exceeds nitrogen pollution from our wastewater treatment plants in 17 counties**, including: Caroline, Carroll, Calvert, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Fredrick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Annes, Somerset, St. Mary's, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester County. Even in counties where wastewater treatment plants are contributing more nitrogen, septic systems are still having a large impact at the local subwatershed level. For example, **16% of Anne Arundel County's nitrogen pollution comes from septic systems**. This is likely higher in waterways such as the South, West, and Rhode River where there are no large wastewater treatment plants discharging.

Now that we have addressed the larger wastewater treatment plants through Bay Restoration Funds, it is time we begin addressing septic systems as part of the battle to address nitrogen pollution to meet our water quality goals. According to MDE, Maryland has approximately 420,000 septic systems in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, 52,000 of which are located in the critical area. **This bill will make BRF funding for septic upgrades more equitable** by expanding the priority funding area beyond critical areas, which is an affluent housing area. Currently, the BRF is prioritizing funding to only about 12% of septic systems in the state.

Finally, given the significance that septic systems now have in nitrogen loading, Arundel Rivers supports securing more funding for septic systems in the BRF by capping the cover crop funding component to \$11.3 million dollars or 40% of the Bay Restoration Septic fund – whichever is less. This is a minor adjustment that will not end funding for the cover crop program but instead add a small increase to septic funding. **Considering new septic systems continue to be installed in the state and agricultural land is**

**declining, Arundel Rivers feels that this cap is a reasonable and necessary change needed to be more successful in reducing nitrogen from septics.**

House Bill 1320 will reduce nitrogen pollution from septic systems by (1) allowing households with failing septic systems within 1,000 ft of a nitrogen-impaired stream to apply for priority funding for upgrades, and 2) capping the current amount of septic upgrade funding that is being transferred to the annual cover crop program.

Arundel Rivers Federation strongly supports addressing nitrogen pollution from septics to improve our local water quality and address human health concerns and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE REPORT on HB1320.**

Sincerely,



Elle Bassett  
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper  
Arundel Rivers Federation