

Senate Bill 73 - Renaming the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program to be the Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program

In Favor: Written Testimony

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My name is Jeffrey Popp, and I currently serve as Director of Restoration at the environmental nonprofit Anne Arundel Watershed Stewards Academy (WSA). I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 73 to rename the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program to the Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program. This change reflects Senate President Miller's legacy and the impactful climate-related work that Corps Members have been carrying out throughout the program's 15 years.

As a two-time mentor to current and past Corps Members, I have seen firsthand how beneficial the program is to the Maryland and Chesapeake communities, both for the young adults who join the program as a first step in their green career journey and for our local natural resources. The program provides the opportunity for Corps Members to gain experience serving with a non-profit or government agency, confidence in their leadership skills, and the knowledge to help tackle the environmental challenges of today and tomorrow. Not only do Corps Members gain these valuable skills and knowledge, but they also gain a network of fellow young adults and establish lifelong personal and professional relationships.

The Corps program provides professional development and many other training opportunities that young adults may otherwise not be able to pursue, setting them up to successfully launch their careers and giving organizations the confidence that they are bringing on experienced team members. WSA has hosted several Corps Members, including a current Corps Member. I am happy to report that we actually hired our 2023-2024 Corps Member from last year to join the team as a full-time Restoration Coordinator. She is one of many Corps alumni who have been hired by their host site through the program. The Corps program creates a pathway to potential full-time employment for Corps Members and is such a benefit for the Members themselves and the organizations in our community that are looking for up and coming leaders in our field.

WSA is a non-profit that was created to build capacity of Anne Arundel County communities to reduce pollutants entering local waterways via stormwater. During the Corps year, WSA's current and former Corps Members have assisted in the management and development of stormwater restoration projects, distribution and installation of thousands of native trees, educating and training Master Watershed Stewards, conducting community outreach and education, as well as developing and led their own capstone projects. This year, our Corps Member is focusing on a behavior change project looking at the "why" that people participate in environmental stewardship. The hope is that once we know more about the "why", we can figure out the missing parts to help remove the barriers to engaging everyone in being involved in environmental initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for this name change and the Corps program.