



Senate Bill 248
Department of Service and Civic Innovation - Maryland Corps Program Service Year
Option Pathways – Revisions
Written Testimony

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Submitted to: Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust (Trust) supports the revisions to the Department of Service and Civic Innovation’s (DSCI) Maryland Corps Program Service Year Option Pathways as outlined in Senate Bill 248. The Trust currently plays a key role in administering the climate-focused placements for young adults through the Service Year Option, as part of our Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps. The proposed revisions to DSCI’s Service Year Option Pathways will better align the program with the Trust’s existing Conservation and Climate Corps, particularly by modifying certain qualifications for applicants and adjusting compensation structures for participants in both the Young Adult Service Year Option Pathway and the Maryland Service Year Option Pathway. These revisions will facilitate greater alignment and collaboration between the programs. Coordinating in this way will allow a one-stop-shop application experience for young people interested in climate service and host organizations interested in mentoring these young people. This partnership can help Maryland corps reach its goal of 2,000 young adult corps participants per year most efficiently by leveraging ongoing corps work through the Trust.

Background on the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps

The Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps places young people ages 18-25 in year-long, stipend-supported terms of service at host not-for-profit entities across the region. The Corps was established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2010, first proposed by Senate President Mike Miller, and expanded under the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022. Corps members:

- 1) work on a project to advance their Host Organizations’ missions in the realms of watershed restoration, energy conservation, climate, climate justice, agriculture, and K-12 environmental education (expanding their Host Organizations’ capacity),
- 2) receive life and career skills training, and
- 3) learn to lead their own independent projects (including developing budgets and managing grants).

Host Organizations include environmental and non-environmental entities (e.g., faith institutions, local governments, school systems, civic associations with social missions, etc.) alike.

In its first 15 years, 428 alums have completed the Conservation Corps



program. Thirty percent of Corps members are generally immediately hired by their Host Organizations or another host in the program, many into new jobs that were made possible by the expanded capacity at the Host Organization driven by the Corps member's service. Hundreds of organizations have served as Host Organizations, many of which expanded in size during this period and have filled their staffs with Corps alums.



Over the 15 years of the Corps, members have planted 10,000 trees and 30,000 native plants and engaged 40,000 students and volunteers as part of their 400+ individual capstone projects.

From 2010 to 2023, the Corps was supported only by the Chesapeake Bay Trust's unrestricted revenue (mostly Chesapeake vehicle license plate and tax checkoff funds), a mandated contribution from Maryland DNR, and voluntary contributions from the National Park Service, BGE, and others. For FY24, your committee approved an additional \$1.5 million mandated in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, which also required an increase in the members' stipends, allowing an expansion of the Corps from 33 members to 50+ members.

Demand for the Chesapeake Conservation Corps has to date exceeded available resources by about double. Last year (2024-2025 Corps year), 145 prospective Corps members applied to serve, and 112 not-for-profit entities applied as hosts. For the 2025-2026 Corps class supported by this appropriation, 124 entities applied to serve as hosts with the member deadline in March.

More recently, the Trust has been working with the Governor's new Department of Service and Civic Innovation, which is managing the new Service Year and Maryland Corps programs. As noted above, the Trust has been supporting the administration of the climate placements for the Service Year option. Our goal is to continue to coordinate to offer young people seamless Climate Corps opportunities.

More information about the Corps can be found at www.cbtrust.org/corps.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a nonprofit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work with groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based and reach large institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting on average 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$200 million through more than 12,500 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985 (www.cbtrust.org/impact). We make about 450 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation to support its operations, instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland's online

boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for more than two decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenets in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues, and that theme characterizes all the Trust's programs, including the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources.