



**Testimony in OPPOSITION of SB371 – Water Pollution Control - Discharge Permits -  
Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations**

Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee  
February 6, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **OPPOSITION OF SB371** on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust.

**Assateague Coastal Trust is dedicated to its mission of conservation, preservation, and protection of the waterways of Worcester County and Maryland’s Lower Eastern Shore.** Our work helps ensure that residents and visitors to Maryland’s coast forever enjoy the resources provided by our coastal waters.

This bill would eliminate the requirement that a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) obtain a water discharge permit before beginning construction, weakening one of the safeguards protecting Chesapeake and Coastal Bays waterways.

**Discharge permits exist to prevent pollution before it occurs.** Allowing CAFO construction to begin without a permit undermines environmental review, limits meaningful public engagement, and pressures regulators to approve projects after significant investment has already been made. This bill creates a special exemption for one industry and erodes the integrity of Maryland’s environmental protections at a time when strong state oversight is more important than ever.

Assateague Coastal Trust recognizes the importance of the Chicken industry as a major economic driver across the Lower Eastern Shore. However, it is of great importance that consideration be given to the effects removal of this permit could have on tourism and seafood harvest industries; both of which on the Eastern Shore are intimately tied to water quality and health.

Worcester County is already heavily burdened by poultry CAFOs that generate enormous volumes of manure. Excess nutrients from these operations routinely contaminate groundwater and runoff into nearby waterways, including the Maryland Coastal Bays. Water testing in the region has found unsafe nitrate levels, exposing residents to serious health risks such as cancer, thyroid disease, and “blue baby syndrome.” These impacts disproportionately affect rural, low-income communities.

The Coastal Bays are especially vulnerable to nutrient pollution, which fuels algae blooms, degrades water quality, and harms fisheries, tourism, and the local economy. Allowing CAFOs to move forward without demonstrating compliance with even minimal permit standards puts these fragile ecosystems and nearby communities at even greater risk.

For these reasons we urge this committee to uphold the sound reasoning for the permitting process and its necessity for protecting Maryland's waterways. Maryland has a duty to protect clean water, public health, and overburdened communities.

Assateague Coastal Trust urges an **UNFAVORABLE REPORT** on **SB371**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Taylor Swanson", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Taylor Swanson,**  
Executive Director and Assateague COASTKEEPER  
Assateague Coastal Trust