



# ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER



## Favorable Testimony – HB 1520

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the impact that the Sustainable Maryland program has made on Maryland's communities, as well as the importance of codifying this high performing program through HB 1520 – Sustainable Maryland Program Fund – Establishment.

As you know, local governments have many competing priorities, which are often at odds with the scale of resources and capacity available to invest in those needs. While Maryland municipalities are increasingly taking the lead in addressing local sustainability goals, challenges such as inadequate training, a lack of a clear direction, insufficient funding, and limited capacity are still common.

The Environmental Finance Center's Sustainable Maryland (SM) program works to fill these gaps. SM is a nonpartisan, free and voluntary outreach and certification program that supports Maryland's 157 municipalities in choosing a direction for their greening efforts; completing their chosen actions with help from program tools, trainings, case studies, and other resources; and, being recognized statewide for their accomplishments. The SM program provides a cohesive, tailored, and replicable process for community-based action that fosters a pipeline for continued engagement between residents and municipal governments.

### **Local Impact**

Since the launch of the program in 2011, SM has:

- Registered 79 municipalities and certified 38, representing 50% and 25% of the state's cities and towns respectively.
- Engaged over 20% of Maryland communities with population under 1,000.
- Mobilized and trained more than 50 Green Teams in municipalities across the state, from Garrett County to Ocean City.
- Developed local leadership by providing training and education opportunities that have collectively engaged more than 1,400 elected officials, local government staff, and community members across the state.
- Certified and cataloged over 1,000 individual sustainability actions taken by SM- Certified communities.
- Assisted 19 communities with implementing watershed stewardship programming for residents.

### **Benefits to the State**

The SM program coordinates and promotes state environmental goals and serves as a cost-effective partner to engage local communities to advance statewide initiatives. For many Maryland municipalities, the SM program serves as both a clearinghouse for state and regional environmental initiatives, as well as a single point of contact for any sustainability-related issues they may come across.

The SM program:

- Streamlines state initiatives, such as the MEA Maryland Smart Energy Communities, DHCD Keep Maryland Beautiful, and DNR Coast Smart, into one comprehensive SM Action Menu as a means of reducing the outreach redundancies that often burden local governments.
- Leverages existing relationships in SM network to cost-effectively increase participation in sustainability initiatives and promote faster adoption of policies.

- Partners with state agencies and other subject matter experts to help achieve statewide sustainability goals by building out sustainability initiatives through the SM Action Menu, leadership trainings, peer-to-peer learning, and on-going technical assistance.

### **Current Funding Needs**

Currently, the SM program is severely underfunded. While the program started nine years ago with seed funding from the Town Creek Foundation and the Environmental Protection Agency, early funds were intended to establish initial proof of concept and demonstrate statewide impact. At this point, Sustainable Maryland has most certainly done this, but without direct investment from the State, not only will the opportunity to leverage existing momentum and expand programmatic offerings go unrealized, even the most basic development and maintenance of the core program functions will remain unsupported. Establishing the Sustainable Maryland Program Fund would be transformative -- for the Sustainable Maryland program itself, for the communities that heavily rely on the technical assistance program to achieve their local goals, and for the advancement of State goals, priorities and programs.

HB 1520 would provide core funding for staff to:

- Coordinate with state agencies in the development of community-based policy solutions
- Direct a community-based small grants program for the implementation of local projects
- Grow the SM network to additional communities across the state
- Offer a robust suite of training and peer-network learning opportunities
- Increase recognition for the participating communities
- Expand and enhance the SM Action Menu and certification program
- Develop the next generation of sustainability leaders

Without State funding, small rural towns such as Burkittsville, will not have access to ongoing technical assistance to develop their own capacity for addressing community challenges. Without State funding, residential Green Teams along Prince George's County's Route 1 corridor will not have a network convener to facilitate regional solutions. Without State funding, the majority of local governments in Maryland will no longer have the support of a proven framework to prioritize community goals towards local action.

The Environmental Finance Center's Sustainable Maryland program is a highly-effective and trusted initiative serving a unique role throughout the state. While there are other state and local nonprofits that may offer similar services on specific aspects of sustainability, the SM program is the only comprehensive, locally-focused statewide sustainability program. And SM is the only statewide effort organizing Green Teams at the local level. These advisory bodies harness both the personal passions of residents, as well as the vast array of professional expertise, and bring it to bear for the benefit of their communities. After nine years of launching new Green Teams, organizing peer leadership networking events, and facilitating the replication of innovative projects and programs across the state, it is clear that Sustainable Maryland has demonstrated the value and effectiveness of the program.

We hope you will take this opportunity to support the expansion of this cost-effective, trusted, and beneficial program so that it can continue to provide technical assistance, coordinate local efforts, and encourage the attainment of local sustainability priorities throughout the State.

### **For More Information Contact:**

Jen Cotting	Environmental Finance Center Director
Mike Hunninghake	Sustainable Maryland Program Director