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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Favorable Testimony – HB 1520 Sustainable Maryland Program Fund

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson and colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation **HB 1520, Sustainable Maryland Program Fund – Establishment**, which would help ensure local governments have the education, technical assistance, and financial resources necessary to improve the environment and quality of life in their communities.

This bill will expand and enhance the Sustainable Maryland program, a unique effort that has mobilized and trained over 50 Green Teams, from Garret County to Ocean City; provides direct environmental technical assistance to over half of Maryland’s municipalities; and continues to empower local action and realize statewide environmental, economic, and social sustainability goals every day.

Is this needed?

The State of Maryland has a number of ambitious environmental goals - reductions in statewide greenhouse gas emissions, a commitment to continuous improvement of sustainability materials management, as well as restoring the Chesapeake Bay. These statewide goals will require local government solutions. A successful outcome to these challenges will depend entirely on the state’s ability to mobilize support and resources around concrete community action.

While there are other state and local nonprofits that address aspects of environmental sustainability, Sustainable Maryland is the only program that is taking a comprehensive and locally-focused approach to tackling statewide issues. The Sustainable Maryland program helps communities that frequently lack the awareness and capacity to take full advantage of available state and nonprofit resources by providing elected officials, staff, and local Green Teams the education and technical assistance needed to manage local challenges and strategically prioritize action. The Sustainable Maryland program also provides the training and information necessary to communicate the importance of sustainability to residents, establish plans of action, and maximize related funding for improving Maryland’s communities.

For the past four years, this highly effective community-focused resource has remained largely underfunded and is now in jeopardy. The Sustainable Maryland program is at a pivotal point where it needs state support to continue serving local communities, providing technical assistance, and acting as a convener of a growing statewide network of sustainability champions.

What is the community impact of funding?

Maryland communities, which are often under-resourced, rely on technical assistance and outreach from the Sustainable Maryland program to fill capacity gaps and achieve community sustainability goals. HB 1520 would help ensure that municipalities across the state continue to receive the training and education needed to build their own capacity. In addition, the bill would establish a community-based small grants program for the implementation of local projects. This will help many smaller communities that do not traditionally have the ability to pursue the larger funding opportunities available.

The Sustainable Maryland program is a cost-reduction strategy for state agency and regional efforts. The program's Action Menu encompasses many of the state sustainability-related programs and resources into one framework that communities engage with regularly. This streamlined approach to engaging communities reduces the burden on local governments and creates economies of scale for promoting existing initiatives. HB 1520 would expand and enhance the Sustainable Maryland Action Menu and program outreach efforts leveraging the highly utilized Sustainable Maryland network to engage a broader audience than any single issue initiative would have access to.

Lastly, HB 1520 would allow the SM program to expand this proven framework to other communities across the state. It would grow the network of certified municipalities, while also increasing coordination with county governments, homeowners associations, faith-based institutions, schools and other community-based organizations.

Who else is using a statewide-local sustainability framework?

This framework has proven successful in 11 other states. California, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin each support a unique statewide-local sustainability education and certification program that provides guidance, standards, technical resources, recognition and funding to assist local governments. Other states across the country, such as Ohio and Iowa, are also exploring establishing similar sustainability program frameworks for supporting local change.

Unfortunately, without a strong, locally-focused sustainability program, communities in Maryland will struggle to obtain the resources necessary to achieve ambitious and wide-ranging goals. After 8 years, the Sustainable Maryland program is a trusted, well-established, and proven framework for engaging on a number of different community-based issues. By expanding and enhancing this program, we fulfill our commitment to local communities and help position the state to achieve its sustainability goals.

Let's make smart investments in our local communities' quality of life and wellbeing. I urge a favorable report, and thank you for your consideration.