

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH

Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

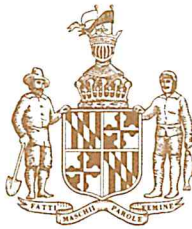
Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 103
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3578 • 301-858-3578
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578
Fax 410-841-3156 • 301-858-3156
Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 19, 2019

Testimony in Favor of SB460

**State Government – Office of the Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman – Establishment
(Environmental Accountability and Transparency Act of 2020)**

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 460. This bill would establish an Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman within the Attorney General's office to provide additional oversight, investigatory support, and communications assistance for our State Agencies and the public.

As the 2017 Spending Affordability Briefing indicates, there have been thousands of jobs abolished in the Executive Branch - many of these jobs the Departments of Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture. This staffing shortage has been detrimental to the ability of these Departments to properly function, with the most challenges related to their enforcement capabilities. When these Departments are not able to properly enforce our laws, our environment suffers - our WIP goals are not met, our waterways are suffocated with sediment, and illegal pesticide usage may go unnoticed. This bill would address these challenges by giving these departments additional investigatory and enforcement support through this newly created Ombudsman.

Furthermore, the staffing shortages that our Departments have experienced has led to a lack of public involvement and communication in the enforcement of our laws. Our government best functions when we are transparent and facilitate public involvement. The Ombudsman created under this legislation would do just this as they would readily receive and investigate citizen complaints. The Ombudsman would also maintain a website for the general public to use to further facilitate active public engagement.

Specifically, SB460 calls for the Ombudsman to: receive and process complaints that involve suspected environmental and natural resources violations; refer each complaint to the appropriate State or local enforcement agency; maintain a database of these complaints in consultation with the Departments; provide updates to the citizens that submitted the complaint; and maintain a website with this information as well.

We must make sure that we give both our citizens and our departments the ability to enforce our environmental laws - SB460 is an important step towards this critical goal. Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sarah Elfreth".

Sarah Elfreth