



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 614

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

CBF POSITION: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

DATE: February 19, 2020

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) SUPPORTS HB 614 as enhancing transparency and responsiveness to environmental violation complaints and providing public accountability for environmental agency enforcement actions. The Environmental Accountability and Transparency Act creates an autonomous Office of Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman housed within the State Office of the Attorney General to assist with communication between the public and the agencies on their activities. The office would maintain a website with information regarding pollution complaints for the Maryland Departments of Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.

Access to information regarding reported environmental violations and enforcement actions, as provided in this legislation, may ease, rather than add to current administrative burdens. Under this legislation, the Environmental and Natural Resources Ombudsman would maintain a website that lists inspection and enforcement actions, violations deemed “significant noncompliance,” and other violations and enforcement information from the Maryland Departments of Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. The information must be kept for three years and maintained in a database format that is searchable by category. This readily available resource may reduce the need for members of the public and advocacy organizations to resort to public information requests, or repeated inquiries into past agency actions.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation regularly communicates with agencies regarding complaints of environmental violations, including violations of erosion and sediment control laws related to new construction, and agriculture-related concerns, such as livestock exclusion from streams or CAFO stormwater pond overflows. This legislation’s concentration of communications responsibility in one office would greatly expedite response and follow-up with these and other complainants, delivering the intended public access and encouraging critical public engagement.

For these reasons, CBF urges a FAVORABLE report on HB 614. If you have any questions, contact Robin Clark Eilenberg, Maryland Staff Attorney at 443.482.2165 or reilenberg@cbf.org.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 107,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.