

February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear General Assembly Members,

My name is Hemalatha Bhaskaran and I am a teacher at James M Bennett High School in Salisbury. Imagine David Attenborough's voice saying, *"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced"*. These words motivated me as new teacher 16 years ago to find every opportunity for my students to learn outside, experience their local environments, take pride in the communities, solve local issues so that they can care, appreciate and value their community. Chesapeake Bay Foundation has played a crucial role in creating all the opportunities for our students to have meaningful connections and experiences with both their school and their community.

CBF provides our students authentic learning experiences that prepares our students to be innovative thinkers and problem solvers. The outdoor field experiences that CBF provides creates opportunities for our students to develop flexibility, leadership and communication skills which are all essential to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. The contributions of CBF go above and beyond students' learning the content. CBF's unique educational programs provide opportunities for social-emotional development which helps students build a sense of community. CBF has provided opportunities for our students and teachers to be leaders in our community. CBF has helped me grow professionally through Teacher Environmental Literacy Leadership program.

CBF is an integral part of my students' learning. While CBF's regular school programs are on hold, CBF has designed innovative programs that support our schools in the virtual and hybrid learning environments. Since last April, my students are learning about their community through CBF's Learn Outside Learn At Home (LOLA). Last semester my students were planning and conducting investigations with CBF educators through their Online Watershed Learning (OWL). This semester my students are looking forward to working with CBF.

I am kindly requesting you to **please support the restoration of CBF's State Aided Institution funding in the Maryland State Department of Education budget**. Your support and restoration of funds will provide opportunities and experiences for students that will connect them to their communities. CBF's Education Programs have helped thousands of Maryland children make these deep connections to the bay and love their culture and community.

Sincerely,

Hemalatha Bhaskaran

1412 Killarney Dr

Salisbury, Md- 21804