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The first time I ever heard about CBF's Student Leadership Program, one of their 6 Environmental Education Programs offered in Maryland, was from my 9th grade biology teacher. She spoke about how you had the opportunity to go on summer expeditions on islands in the Bay, and meet new people from all over the watershed. I knew right away that I had to sign up and that was the first thing I did when I got home. Weeks later, I received an email of my acceptance from the program coordinator and an invitation to their upcoming summer expeditions. That year though, they were going to be run virtually due to COVID. Although I wasn't going to be able to get the full in-person experience of visiting the islands and riding boats through the Bay, I still took up the opportunity and spent two weeks of my summer learning all about environmental advocacy and the health of the watershed - from riparian buffers to heat islands and from oysters to birds.

I enjoyed every second I spent on the virtual expeditions where I met other students passionate about the environment and cultivated my love, appreciation, and concern for the Chesapeake Bay. It is because of CBF and their Student Leadership Program that I have the chance to advance how I can advocate for, raise awareness about, and take action to save the Bay. Without CBF's Environmental Education Programs like this one, I, and so many other students like me, wouldn't get to gain the knowledge and awareness about the environment that we live in and interact with every day. We also wouldn't be able to find the same opportunities like letter writing and tree planting that CBF offers us to empower us to protect our environment.

CBF's Student Leadership Program has impacted me in so many ways, one of the biggest ways is making my voice heard. From all my treasured experiences in the outdoors - hiking, fishing, camping, white water rafting, and much more - I have developed deep care for keeping the environment healthy and protected so that I and the rest of the residents on this planet can continue to make one-of-a-kind memories immersed in nature. Advocating for environmental legislation is invaluable to fighting for this environment that I care so much about. I still remember the very first letter I sent to my Senator as a thank you for his support for passing the American Conservation Enhancement Act. Then two months later, I received a reply from his office and to this day I still can't believe that my email - among the hundreds of other emails, letters, and postcards he probably receives on a daily basis - was read and replied to. I felt grateful knowing that my words that communicated my support for environmental protection were acknowledged by my Senator.

With the hope that I can continue expressing my support for environmental legislation and influencing my representatives to support what I believe in, I take up as many advocacy opportunities that CBF shares with me as I can. It truly is something that I want to use my voice to make a difference in. Not only do CBF's Environmental Education Programs provide me with these resources, but the program coordinators help and encourage me along the entire way, which is why I am always appreciative of their support.

Please support the restoration of CBF's state Funding for Educational Organizations so that CBF can continue to offer these important experiences to students across the state. Through CBF's Environmental Education Programs, I am able to learn more about advocacy opportunities, connect with other students who share my passion, and take the initiative to save the environment that I am so fortunate to be able to protect.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sophia Ashley Liang
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