



Testimony in Support of House Bill 1267–Workgroup on Public Water Access

February 24, 2021

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB1267 - Workgroup on Public Water Access** - on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with 3,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration and education. ShoreRivers believes that diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our staff, board, supporters, and programs is critical to achieving our mission of clean water.

Maryland's Eastern Shore is well known for its rural character and sparse populations. A byproduct of our rural nature is extremely limited public transportation options. **Without access to a personal car, most public parks and public water access points are simply unavailable to our citizens.** On the Chester River, the main stem has over 85 miles of shoreline, with only 12 DNR advertised public access points across 2 counties. Of these 12, *all but 2* access points are solely boat launch locations with parking lots. Again, unless an individual has access to a personal vehicle *and* access to or ownership of a boat, waterfront access to the Chester River is virtually impossible.

Lack of public access is not an issue specific to the Eastern Shore. For the 7,719 miles of Maryland's Shoreline, only 629 public water access sites exist. Furthermore, current walkable public access points are often most accessible to communities who can both afford to live by the water, and are largely less burdened by environmental health concerns. **The establishment of a workgroup containing a diverse set of stakeholders with personal knowledge of their regions public access and the needs of their community members will be a positive, proactive step as Maryland endeavors to resolve environmental injustices across the state.**

The effects of COVID 19 in the past year have demonstrated more clearly than ever before the necessity of public water access for the health and enjoyment of Maryland's citizens. It has also outlined more clearly than ever, the social inequities of public water access to the communities who are most burdened by environmental hazards and public health concerns. ShoreRivers believe that **access** to waterways fuels environmental stewardship; **inclusion** of diverse communities is essential to long term success; and **diverse representation** in our membership, staff, and board makes us stronger. For this reason and the examples described above, ShoreRivers urges the committee to adopt **House Bill 1267**.

Sincerely,
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
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