



## Senate Bill 228 (Senate President Ferguson) – Written Testimony

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**Date: February 9, 2022**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Submitted to: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust (the Trust) supports the expansion of Corps programs in Maryland as described in SB 228. The Trust was established by the General Assembly in 1985 and was tapped in 2010 by the General Assembly to administer the Chesapeake Conservation Corps, originally proposed by Senate President Mike Miller, who always remained close to the program. SB 228 calls for an expansion of a number of Corps programs and Corps activities, including the Chesapeake Conservation Corps.

### **Importance of Corps Programs**

Corps programs accomplish two important goals in unique ways:

1) Individual growth and earning potential: Corps programs provide young people (and in many cases around the country, not-so-young people) an opportunity to be exposed to a new field and increase the chances for future employment, while supported during the term of service with a stipend to cover living expenses. Often, the types of young people who benefit most from Corps experiences may not otherwise have competed well for the types of positions they can ultimately get after Corps experience. In our Chesapeake Conservation Corps, one of our criteria for acceptance into the program is the likelihood that the individual learns, grows, and uses the experience to become eligible for later career opportunities they never would have otherwise had. Such an opportunity particularly benefits underserved populations, whose youth many not have had opportunities from which others benefit.

2) Community service: Corps programs facilitate in a cost-effective manner, at scale, the filling of community needs that otherwise would not be filled.



## Background on the Chesapeake Conservation Corps

The Chesapeake Conservation Corps annually places 30-40 young people in year-long, stipend-supported terms of service at host not-for-profit entities across the region. The young people 1) work on a project to advance their Host Organizations' missions in the realms of infrastructure, watershed restoration, energy conservation, agriculture, and K-12 education (expanding their Host Organizations' capacity), 2) receive life and career skills training, and 3) learn to lead their own independent projects (including developing budgets and managing grants). Host Organizations include environmental and non-environmental entities (e.g., faith institutions, local governments, school systems, civic associations with social missions, etc.) alike.



## Value of Expanding the Chesapeake Conservation Corps

The demand for the Chesapeake Conservation Corps far exceeds available resources: Each year we can support 35-40 member-host placements, but generally close to 100 prospective members apply and 70-80 not-for-profits organizations vie to serve as hosts for one or more members. The program is poised to easily and efficiently expand to offer more placements, and will do so via SB 228.

Expansion will proportionally increase the success of the program, both for the alumni members and the participating Host Organizations. In its first 12 years, over 300 alums have completed the program. About 30% of the Corps members are immediately hired by their Host Organizations or another host in the program, many into new jobs that were made possible by the expanded capacity driven by the Corps member's service. The other 70% brought their Corps experience with them to continuing education, positions elsewhere in the environmental field, or positions outside the environmental field. Over 200 organizations have served as Host Organizations, many of which expanded in size during this period and have filled their staffs with Corps alums.





## About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a non-profit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and citizen engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work and reach large numbers of groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.



The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting on average 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$130 million through more than 12,000 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985. We make 350-400 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation, and is instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland's online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for fourteen years, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenets in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues, and that theme characterizes the Chesapeake Conservation Corps. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources. Three under-engaged audiences of particular focus identified by our Diversity and Inclusion Committee are the faith-based sector, communities of color, and the human health sector. The Trust has seen much success: The number of students, volunteers, and teachers of color engaged in our grants match the demographics of Maryland. Close to 10% of our grants supported work at faith-based institutions of 13 different religions.



Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the Committee. If you should have any questions regarding the Trust's testimony, please contact us at 410-974-2941 x100 or [jdavis@cbtrust.org](mailto:jdavis@cbtrust.org).