

**Wednesday, February 9, 2022**

**TO:** Paul Pinsky, Chair of Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee; and Committee Members

**FROM:** Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

**POSITION:** Support SB 14 – Sustainable Maryland Program Fund - Establishment

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 14 offered by Senator Elfreth. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

SB 14 seeks to establish the Sustainable Maryland (SM) Program Fund. SM is a free and voluntary outreach and certification program that was first established in 2011 to help Maryland communities pursue a sustainable future. Over the past decade, SM has provided communities with a unique framework with which to benchmark local sustainability initiatives, as well as a comprehensive suite of policies, resources, direct support, and incentives designed to help communities advance a broad range of sustainability goals. The program has certified 16 municipal stormwater management programs, assisted 30 communities in creating watershed stewardship programs, developed municipal carbon footprints for 10 communities to establish greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets and goals, and continues to support local WIPs in improving water quality. Impressively, to date the program has been entirely self-funded and has been offered to communities across the state at no cost; however, the program needs state funding support in order to rise up to meet the growing demands and challenges of climate impacts.

Maryland has set ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. As we work to achieve these goals, we need to increase investment in our local communities to implement new strategies that will address emerging problems. We also face challenging water quality issues in the Chesapeake Bay, which Maryland has already invested significant work and resources into tackling. But we can't stop there; local governments need additional support and investment to protect neighborhoods, infrastructure, and resources on the frontlines of climate change.

While SM has successfully managed an ambitious program that has demonstrated leadership over the years, the program's biggest challenge has been insufficient funding. By investing in the SM Program, state leadership can recognize local governments' necessity in building a sustainable future and communities in Maryland can continue to advance environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

TNC commends Senator Elfreth for introducing this bill, which recognizes the importance of investing in sustainability and empowering local governments and communities to combat climate change.

**Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 14.**