

William M. Eichbaum
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February 16, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
Chair, Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Senator Pinsky,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 367 regarding The Patuxent River Commission. By way of background, I served as Maryland's Assistant Secretary for The Office of Environmental Programs (OEP) from 1980 to 1987 in the then Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. As you will recall OEP was the predecessor to the Maryland Department of the Environment. In my role as Assistant Secretary, I organized the 1981 Charrette of government and non-government stakeholders which developed The Action Plan designed to resolve on going water quality issues in the Patuxent River. I also served as a member of the Patuxent Commission from its inception until 1987.

Senate Bill 367 has the limited purpose of restoring the Patuxent Riverkeeper as a member of the Commission, following Governor Hogan's precipitate replacement of the current Riverkeeper and others. While I support this legislation, it is clear that larger issues are at stake and they are central to achieving a healthy Patuxent River.

Newspaper accounts make it clear that The Hogan Administration seeks to prevent the Commission from addressing land use and development issues in the Patuxent watershed. This attempt runs afoul of both the role of the Commission as originally conceived and the present realities of achieving a clean Patuxent River. In her June, 1984 letter to the public announcing the Commission's plan for the river, Secretary Constance Lieder stated: "The Patuxent River Policy Plan is a land management plan. It is a plan for both the state and seven counties in the watershed." The plan makes clear the Commission's determination that improved land use practices are essential to achieving water quality. In the intervening years, it has been scientifically demonstrated time and again that this policy conclusion is well founded in science.

In conclusion, while I support Senate Bill 367 in its current form I urge the Senate to consider additional language which would make clear that the Commission has an important role to play in assuring that the seven counties of the Watershed manage development and land use decisions so as to improve the River and not harm it.

Sincerely,

(signature on original/on file)

William M. Eichbaum