

January 31, 2022

Honorable Paul Pinsky
Chair, Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Maryland State Senate
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401 – 1991

Favorable Testimony -- SB0014- Sustainable Maryland Program Fund - Establishment

Dear Chair Paul Pinsky, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB0014, which establishes the Sustainable Maryland Program Fund.

The Sustainable Maryland (SM) program has been integral to the City of Gaithersburg's sustainability efforts, with its initial certification designation awarded in 2013, and then again in 2016 and 2019. The in-depth certification review process not only provides recognition for actions being taken, but the ongoing technical assistance, resources, and connection to a peer network also inspires the adoption of new best practices and innovative sustainability solutions.

Most recently, SM partnered with Gaithersburg staff to develop and pilot a Residential Action Framework to increase both awareness and participation in watershed stewardship and sustainability activities in homeowners and condominium associations (HOAs/CAs). The SM pilot launched in 2020 has engaged the leadership and residents of 8 HOAs/CAs within the City of Gaithersburg in the creation of Residential Green Teams and the identification of community-based sustainability and watershed protection activities that could be led by HOAs/CAs. In April 2022, SM will host the second Gaithersburg Sustainability Summit for Homeowners and Civic Associations, and a dozen associations have already expressed interest in joining the program for the 6 slots available for the 2022 cohort. As Sustainable Maryland continues to improve its methods for reaching out, finding champions, and recruiting a critical mass of interested residents, more HOAs/CAs are interested in participating, and we see the potential of leveraging this proven framework for enhancing community participation on a number of sustainability-related issues.

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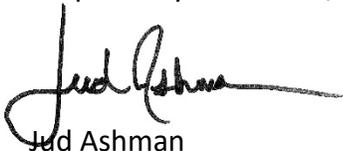
The Sustainable Maryland Certification program affords the City of Gaithersburg with a unique and critical opportunity to benchmark our work on environmental initiatives. It also provides our staff with important information and added motivation to consider new and innovative programs to further our sustainability objectives. Throughout the pandemic, Sustainable Maryland hosted virtual events that brought people together, across jurisdiction boundaries, to share ideas, discuss roadblocks, and provide information to increase the efficiency of small sustainability offices. In these forums, City staff shared information about Gaithersburg's pesticide program and environmental awards programs, while also learning about opportunities to advance our pollinator protection initiative, which resulted in several pollinator friendly gardens being created around the City. Our ecosystem doesn't recognize jurisdictional boundaries, and this connection and networking system has proven critical to advancing our sustainability work, in Gaithersburg and throughout Maryland.

It is with the ongoing support of the SM program and their focus on local efforts that we have been able to strengthen the pathway towards a more Sustainable Gaithersburg. Given the Program's demonstrated success and impact, and the significant environmental challenges facing every community in Maryland, I urge you to support the creation of the Sustainable Maryland Program Fund.

This funding will enable Sustainable Maryland to expand its reach and provide important sustainability training and resources to more Maryland communities. It has been and will continue to be a cost-effective program to achieve significant public environmental benefits.

Thank you for your consideration of the City's position.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jud Ashman", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jud Ashman
Mayor
City of Gaithersburg