

January 21, 2022

FAVORABLE WITH BILL – SB0056: Charles County - Program Open Space – General Assembly Approval

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 0056 on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. As we here at Waterkeepers work to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State, we are also in support of the equitable distribution and availability of parks, playgrounds, and other green spaces for all citizens in the state of Maryland. Although the goal of Program Open Space has been to provide localities with financial and technical assistance for the development of recreational and open space areas, much of the funding provided by the program has been inequitably distributed throughout Maryland. The inequitable distribution of funds to provide parks and other green spaces has created a burden on underserved communities, making it harder for them to experience the open spaces the program is meant to provide.

We here at Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports Senate Bill 0056 and its requirement of approval through legislation enacted by the General Assembly before any local annual or revised program under Program Open Space takes effect or before any grant agreement based on the program is executed. The National Recreation and Park Association has defined “park access” as “The just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks, green spaces and recreation facilities, as well as programming that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone.” We strongly believe that equitable access to parks and green spaces in underserved communities helps foster a healthier, stronger, and more cohesive community. **This legislation will ensure that all communities within the state of Maryland receive the same privileges and access to parks and recreational areas.**

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB0056.

Alexander Villazon

Waterkeepers Chesapeake