

January 21, 2022

**FAVORABLE WITH BILL – SB0128: Charles County - Program Open Space - Waldorf Core Zone**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 0128 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 of Charles County, 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 concentrated in only certain populations of Charles County. This inequitable distribution of funds has left Waldorf, a community that is roughly sixty percent African-American, without any parks, playgrounds, or similar green spaces. To further compound the inequitable distribution of funds to Waldorf, the Waldorf Amphitheatre project that received bond bill funding from the Charles County Delegation has not yet been established.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports Senate Bill 0128 and its requirement of the submission of an annual program of proposed acquisition and development projects to take place in the “Waldorf Core Zone” as defined in the bill. We believe this requirement will help ensure a more equitable distribution of funds from Program Open Space in order to greater benefit the citizens of Waldorf after having been excluded from the recreational benefits provided to their neighbors within Charles County. **This legislation will ensure that all communities within Charles County receive the same privileges and access to parks and recreational areas.**

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB0128.

Alexander Villazon

Waterkeepers Chesapeake