

March 7, 2022

Environment - Green Infrastructure Rebate Program - Establishment (HB1372)

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

The undersigned organizations express their strong support for HB1372 - Environment - Green Infrastructure Rebate Program - Establishment with amendments.

This bill creates a rebate for property owners to recoup the costs of installing green infrastructure such as rain gardens, cisterns, and green roofs on their property. Stormwater runoff is a leading cause of pollution to Maryland's waterways, particularly in urban areas that are covered in pavement and other impervious surfaces. When it rains, much of the rainwater cannot soak into the ground. Instead, it rushes to the nearest storm drain, carrying with it trash, oil, and other pollutants from our streets and pavement. In addition to the pollution in the stormwater itself, the sheer volume of water erodes our stream beds and overwhelms our pipes, contributing to sewage overflows.

In order for regional efforts to reduce pollution to our rivers and the Chesapeake Bay to succeed, stormwater must be better managed, reduced, and treated. Green infrastructure is an increasingly popular approach to better managing stormwater pollution. Green infrastructure is the practice of treating and replacing impermeable hardscape with plant-based and water harvesting systems like rain gardens, trees, and rain barrels that reduce the volume of stormwater, facilitate infiltration into the ground and through root systems, and reduce the rapid delivery of pollution to our waterways.

In addition to improved water quality, green infrastructure also provides numerous co-benefits. Green infrastructure that incorporates native trees, perennials, and shrubs is credited with improving air quality, fostering social cohesion, improving mental health, restoring wildlife habitat, and building climate resilience.¹ Increased trees and vegetation also reduce the urban heat island effect by providing shade and evapotranspiration, improving health outcomes and energy savings.²

While it has numerous benefits, green infrastructure is often costly for individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and other entities to install. By establishing a rebate program, HB1372 will incentivize property owners to invest in green infrastructure and expand its adoption across Maryland. Increasing green infrastructure will not only help Maryland meet its regulatory

¹ Coutts, Christopher and Micah Hahn. (2015). "Green Infrastructure, Ecosystem Services, and Human Health." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, vol. 12. Pgs 9768-9798. DOI: [10.3390/ijerph120809768](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph120809768).

² Saaroni, H., Amorim, J. H., Hiemstra, J. A. & Pearlmutter, D. (2018). "Urban Green Infrastructure as a tool for urban heat mitigation: Survey of research methodologies and findings across different climatic regions." Urban Climate, vol. 24. Pgs 94-110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.uclim.2018.02.001>.

requirements to manage stormwater pollution, but it will also improve climate resiliency, public health, and quality of life for residents.

HB1372 would provide a rebate up to \$4,000 for individuals and up to \$20,000 for commercial and multifamily buildings and properties owned by homeowners, condominium, and civic associations or nonprofit organizations. The State of Maryland would provide 60% of the rebate and participating counties would provide the remaining 40%.

However, as currently written, this bill would establish an “all or nothing” system where only residents who live in participating counties could qualify for the rebate. This means that residents who live in counties that do not opt into the program would be ineligible for the 60% state rebate. Since the state’s share of the rebate is set to come from the Maryland Clean Water Fund, this arrangement would effectively reallocate funding from the Maryland Clean Water Fund to counties that opt into this program and take critical funding away from counties that choose not to opt into this program. Thereby the residents of non participating counties would lose out on funding twice, first by being ineligible for this rebate and second by diverting Maryland Clean Water Fund resources away from their counties.

To remedy these concerns, we recommend an amendment to allow property owners in counties that do not opt into the rebate program to still qualify for the state portion of the rebate.

We also recommend adding conservation landscaping as an eligible green infrastructure project under the program and changing the cap to apply per project rather than per property to account for property transfer and to ensure property owners can implement the practices that meet their needs.

We look forward to continued conversations with the bill sponsor on these amendments or other possible pathways forward.

Thank you for your consideration of HB1372 - Environment - Green Infrastructure Rebate Program - Establishment. For all the reasons stated above, we urge a favorable vote from the committee with these amendments.

Signed,

Waterkeepers Chesapeake