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Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Budget & Taxation Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
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**Senate Bill 611 – Office of the Attorney General – Environment and Natural Resources Monitoring Unit – Establishment**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 611, which would establish the Environment and Natural Resources Monitoring Unit in the Office of the Attorney General. This unit would prosecute the state's criminal environmental and natural resources laws, including bringing and defending cases under wildlife laws and laws associated with the management of public lands and natural and cultural resources in the state. The bill also provides that, on request of the Department of the Environment or the Department of Natural Resources, the unit may assist that Department in investigating or bringing a civil action regarding a violation of the civil environmental or natural resources laws of the state.

This unit is modeled after the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the United States Department of Justice, which has jurisdiction over the enforcement of federal criminal and civil laws. It has been modified from this model in response to concerns that transferring civil jurisdiction at the State level would be extremely disruptive to Maryland's current method of enforcing environmental and natural resources laws by their respective Department to allow the unit to assist with the current enforcement mechanism at the request of either Department.

Police who enforce conservation, environmental, and natural resources laws make up less than 1% of the police force in Maryland. In my experience, there is little to no importance placed on prosecuting environmental crimes by local State's Attorney's offices; these cases usually are assigned the most inexperienced prosecutor if they are pursued at all. This bill is intended to ensure that our State is better able not only to pursue those who violate these laws, but also to compensate those who were negatively impacted, such as the watermen who were restricted from working due to a sewage spill.

Senate Bill 611 is not intended to create any new environmental or natural resources laws or causes of action; it is simply about ensuring that the laws we already have in place are enforced by investigators and prosecutors who are experts in this very complex and specialized part of the law. This legislation recognizes the importance of the State's natural resources as well as the Chesapeake Bay and the thousands of people and families who rely on it.

I have been in discussions with the Attorney General regarding this legislation and support his proposed amendments to this bill. For that reason, I respectfully request a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 611. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Bailey', written over a horizontal line.

Senator Jack Bailey