



SB306 – Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions

Testimony before

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 31, 2024

Position: Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in support of SB306, which would authorize the Critical Area Commission to adopt regulations that take into account climate change and environmental justice and equity. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We appreciate the leadership of Chair Feldman in sponsoring this important legislation by request of the Critical Area Commission.

Over the past decades, it has become clear that the Chesapeake watershed was being negatively impacted by land use and population growth. Previously the Maryland General Assembly enacted the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Protection Program to oversee future development. The Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission was created to manage this program.

While this Commission has worked to limit the impacts to water quality and the natural environments, they themselves recognize that that should no longer be their sole interests, and instead more focus is needed to address climate change and that the policies are created and implemented in an equitable way. This bill will attempt to remedy that.

First, it will state that there are “critical and substantial state interests” in both establishing ways to prepare and adapt to climate change and that the benefits and burdens of these methods are equitably distributed. The bill will also require that each fiscal year, the Governor shall include money for grants to assist local jurisdictions to incorporate climate resiliency and equitable planning. There are also terms within the bill for local jurisdictions to follow. The consideration of climate change and equity crucial and should be considered in all bills, but especially ones focused on land areas at the most risk of sea level rise, storm surge and flooding.

For these reasons, we support SB306.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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