

**March 27, 2024**

**TO:** Marc Korman, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee; Ben Barnes, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and Committee Members

**FROM:** Humna Sharif, The Nature Conservancy, Climate Adaptation Manager; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

**POSITION:** Support SB 148 Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program - Funding for Underserved and Overburdened Communities

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 148 offered by Senator Alonzo Washington. SB 148 requires the Governor to include in the annual State budget an appropriation for the Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program of at least \$20 million starting in FY 2026. This bill integrates environmental justice considerations by establishing that at least 40% of funding provided under the comprehensive flood management grant program shall be used for projects located in or directly benefiting underserved or overburdened communities.

Maryland has a rich and vibrant coastline linked to the lives and livelihoods of the state's residents, with every passing day our state faces increased threats linked to climate change. In Maryland, sea level is expected to rise approximately one foot by 2050, and three feet by 2100, this will change our state's coastlines dramatically. Sea level rise and increased instances of extreme weather events are urgent climate impacts that will manifest in more flooding along our coastlines. Maryland also faces flooding challenges along stream banks due to erosion and land subsidence. We urgently need increased and sustained funding sources to support local governments' flood resilience efforts – for the health and well-being of Maryland's communities and its natural resources.

Climate change impacts are disparate and are not felt equally by all Marylanders. These impacts, including flooding, often burden those who already face historic inequities. Coastal communities' needs when facing the first and most extreme flooding in our state, especially on the Eastern Shore, have gone unmet for a long time. By ensuring that 40% of new appropriations from the Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program flow to historically overburdened, underserved and marginalized communities, this bill supports an equitable vision for coastal resilience in Maryland.

Planning for climate change's uncertain impacts, including flooding after storm events, is a highly local and place-based process that is necessary to identify solutions that can meet the unique needs of each community. The increased appropriations, and the environmental justice considerations of SB 148 are an opportunity to catalyze innovative flood management planning. It will bring much needed funding to local governments, allowing them to build flood resilience capacity within their own communities.

We are asking that the committees pass SB 148 and HB 449 in the same posture, with the sponsor amendments introduced at the House hearing. There was an additional amendment in the Senate version (found in lines 22-23 on p.4 of the reprint) that added "areas in which over 90% of households are at extreme risk of flooding in the next 30 years" to be included in the 40% carveout for the funds.

TNC **does not support** the second amendment as it weakens the environmental justice provisions of the bill, which originally allocated at least 40% of funds from the Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program to overburdened and underserved communities. Adding the second amendment to the 40% provision would mean that affluent communities prone to flooding can now be eligible for funding that was meant for overburdened and

underserved communities. Communities that face a high pollution burden and have been historically excluded from resources need legislation to specifically prioritize their needs – we strongly urge committee members to elevate the original intent of this legislation and reject amendments that would take funding away from vulnerable communities.

Maryland as a state is a leader in taking proactive steps for climate mitigation and adaptation, and SB 148 continues to uphold that legacy of bringing critical resources to those who need them most. This bill is consistent with Maryland’s 2030 commitments on building the state’s adaptive capacity and resilience to flooding.

TNC commends the Senator Washington for introducing this bill. Funding measures in the state must prioritize restorative justice and address historical inequities that have created disparate climate impacts – SB 148 is a step in the right direction. **Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 148.**