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SUPPORT: HB 233 - Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV **supports HB 233 - Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions**, and we thank the Critical Areas Commission for their leadership on this issue.

The Critical Area Protection Program, acting as a partnership between the state and the 61 local jurisdictions to which the program applies, has been successfully functioning to provide more appropriate land use regulation to the lands along the tidal bays in Maryland since its establishment 40 years ago. The law itself was unprecedented and groundbreaking at its outset, borne out of a response to the deteriorating health of the bay ecosystem and a shared regard for the need to act in response. Now, with HB 233, the Critical Area Commission is requesting the Maryland General Assembly support the legacy of stewardship to the tidal bays by offering

critical updates.

In 1984, when the Maryland General Assembly established the Critical Area Protection Program, protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay was the sole motivation, ensuring stewardship of the buffer of land along the estuary. Today, as we face an unprecedented changing climate, we recognize that the boundary lands along these estuaries also provide mitigation and added resiliency against rising tides. The inclusion of climate change in the Critical Area Protection Program's standards provides a timely amendment to allow the program to respond to the environmental changes our tidal waters and their adjoining lands are already experiencing.

Maryland League of Conservation Voters supports HB 233, which will resolve inefficiencies in administrative procedures and, more importantly, offers important changes in response to climate change - including recognition of the coastal inundation due to sea level rise and land subsidence we are already experiencing and know will continue to occur throughout the next century.

Another important component of this bill, HB 233 looks to install equity as a factor in procedures and decision making related to the critical area. Developing standards by which no one population is unduly burdened by the choices made by another should be an essential tenet of our state laws. Maryland LCV supports the effort to establish this provision along with more inclusive public participation processes to deliver both greater equity and accountability in their application of this program.

Maryland LCV urges a **favorable** report on this important bill.