



**House Environment and Transportation Committee
Testimony by Mark Conway
Executive Vice President of External Affairs
Chesapeake Conservancy
March 1, 2024**

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce, and Committee Members, thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

For the record, I am Mark Conway, a Maryland resident, and Executive Vice President of External Affairs for Chesapeake Conservancy.

I am here to voice our strong support for the passage of HB 1165, the Whole Watershed Act, because we know that it will work. We've seen it work with our neighbors to the north, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Starting in 2019, partners including local, state, and federal governments, conservation districts, nonprofits, universities and others envisioned a rapid stream delisting program as a way to make the most of limited resources.

In these communities, there was already so much focus on the EPA mandate around the impaired waters list in the Integrated Water Quality Report--this strategy doubles down on those efforts while achieving the nutrient load reductions we need to clean up the Bay.

We use high-resolution data to focus in on headwaters where our collective work over 2-5 years to restore farmland could make a measurable difference by the year 2030.

The priorities and strategies are unique to each stream, driven by local values and capacity.

And we mean local--these streams are only 1-5 miles, narrowing in on about 5-15 priority farms.

The planning process is pretty straightforward and intuitive--come up with an outreach strategy and then a plan and budget for the most cost-effective BMPs to address the impairment.

We're building that queue and aggregating these projects into regional grant proposals like the two NRCS RCPP awards totaling over \$17M across central PA and Lancaster for stream delisting.

We're doing in-stream monitoring and in PA much like in Maryland, the goal is tangible--the stream is either on the impaired list or it's not, and that's based on the aquatic insect communities and physical habitats to our streams.

We're now working across 56 streams in seven Pennsylvania counties and the 2024 draft Integrated Water Quality Report is showing preliminary delistings across four of our streams.

The interest from the state of Maryland shows that just four years later, it's now possible to scale this across the Bay watershed, expanding our measures of success to reflect priorities beyond agricultural streams and including a variety of co-benefits relevant to our Maryland communities.

Thank you for listening.