

Testimony in Support of HB1101
Standing - Environmental and Natural Resources Protection Proceedings
(Clean Water Justice Act of 2024)

March 1, 2024

To: Chair Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

My name is Tom Taylor. I live in Greenbelt, near three streams that flow through the city and that are within the Anacostia River watershed, and I urge a favorable report on HB1101.

I am an active volunteer engaged in our community's efforts to protect the three Greenbelt streams – Beaverdam Creek, Indian Creek, and Still Creek. I also serve on the Stormwater Management Subcommittee of my housing cooperative, Greenbelt Homes. All of us who are engaged in these efforts recognize the importance of the health of our streams to our community and to the entire Anacostia River watershed.

The Clean Water Justice Act allows communities harmed by illegal water pollution to enforce state law. Access to the courts to enforce laws that protect communities from pollution was at the heart of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA). Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court recently removed a majority of streams and wetlands from Clean Water Act protection. Fortunately, Maryland still protects these waterways, but it has no right for communities to enforce the law like under the CWA.

Wetlands and streams are the lungs and kidneys of our landscape – filtering out pollution, keeping drinking water clean, protecting us from flooding and storm surges, and providing a priceless amount of benefits. These aquatic ecosystems are also among the very most valuable biodiverse habitats. Now, the majority of these waterways are only protected by Maryland law. Given our urgent climate and biodiversity crises, we should be doing everything we can to protect these waterways.

The Clean Water Justice Act will:

- Provide a new right for impacted community members to enforce the law in state court the same way that they were previously able to do in federal court under the Clean Water Act.
- Give Marylanders the same degree of access to state courts as they have in federal court.
- Repair the threat to Maryland's critical water resources caused by the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

It's important to note that the bill does not create a right of judicial review of final agency actions, and does not expand standing beyond that provided by federal courts, essentially restoring the enforcement of clean water laws to what existed before the Supreme Court's ruling.

I support this bill because I recognize its importance for protecting the streams that we care about so much. This legislation gives us an important legal vehicle to protect our streams and the whole watershed from ever-present environmental threats. We want to do everything we possibly can to maintain stream health and the crucial contribution they provide to the ecological health of our communities and the natural landscape of which they are a part.

Please give a favorable report on HB1101. Thank you for considering my views.

Sincerely,

Tom Taylor
11-G Laurel Hill Road
Greenbelt, MD 20770
301-513-9524