



Choose Clean Water

COALITION

February 14, 2025

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

To Chair Feldman and members of the Committee,

The undersigned organizations of the Choose Clean Water Coalition offer testimony in support of SB898, which seeks to prevent water pollution from agricultural fertilizer use that would otherwise be permitted 100 feet from Maryland tidal water, increase land voluntarily enrolled in conservation to further increase nutrient reductions, create the state's first incentive program that provides value to tenant farmers — the growing future for on-farm conservation. This effort is in service of accelerating Bay restoration efforts that bolster progress while including incentives for the farming industry more comprehensively than ever before.

After 40 years of tremendous effort, the Chesapeake Bay and its communities fall short of the success we envisioned at the creation of the Bay Agreement. Creative policies and implementation practices are needed to fill the restoration gap and achieve the full potential of the Bay Agreement. This bill is a direct response to recent scientific reports, including the Bay Program's *Comprehensive Evaluation of the System Response*, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension's *Riparian Buffer Management Fact Sheet*, and the Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology's *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Economic Incentives to Enhance Riparian Buffer Adoption and Environmental Benefits for Water Quality and Carbon Sequestration*, which all cite riparian buffer adoption as one of, if not the most, cost efficient practice to maximize pollution reductions. Several of these reports also offer evidence that our States incentive programs must be strategically targeted to maximize results and investments, and that incentives must be paired with creative policies to increase participation. SB898 addresses these important recommendations by:

1. Increasing the nutrient application setback on farms bordering tidal waters to 100 feet to reduce nutrient pollution and address the nutrient mass imbalance outlined in the Bay programs CESR report;
2. Increasing incentives for voluntary land enrollment in forest and grass buffers within the 100 foot setbacks;
3. Establish incentives for leased land operators who farm land enrolled in conservation within the 100 foot buffer.

In a time where Maryland's budget faces distinct challenges, it has never been more important to target state investments in conservation that achieves the greatest results, while minimizing

impact to Maryland's farmland to less than half of one percent. We are grateful to Senator Love for bringing this important legislation forward and look to this committee for a favorable report on SB898.

Sincerely,

Arundel Rivers Federation
Assateague Coastal Trust
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Clean Water Action
Corsica River Conservancy
Friends of St Clements Bay
Izaak Walton League of America
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Pesticide Education Network
Mid-Atlantic Youth Anglers & Outdoors Partners
National Aquarium
National Parks Conservation Association
Rachel Carson Council
Safe Healthy Playing Fields, Inc.
ShoreRivers
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
The 6th Branch
Waterkeepers Chesapeake