



## Support for Senate Bill 898

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The Chesapeake Legal Alliance strongly supports Senate Bill 898. In budgetary conditions such as these, it is imperative for the State to take a close look at the cost-effectiveness of its investments. There are few, if any, pollution reduction projects that can more cost-effectively promote Chesapeake Bay restoration progress than those in this bill.

The state-federal Chesapeake Bay Program that oversees this national effort to restore water quality in the Bay provides data on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of hundreds of different types of pollution reduction practices and policies. Riparian buffers are near the top of that list. At between \$2 and \$4 per pound of nitrogen pollution reduced, this category of pollution reduction project is an order of magnitude more cost-effective than other agricultural practices that are generally well-subsidized by current State policy. For example, cover cropping, which the state spends roughly \$25 million per year on, is reported to cost between \$20 and \$25 per pound. And while the \$2 - \$4 per pound figure for grass and tree buffers is already cheaper than almost any other type of project, the spending that this bill would incentivize would be even more cost-effective because it specifically focuses on areas where a much greater share of runoff reaches our waters – right along the Bay and its tidal tributaries. In other words, even the incredibly low figure of \$2 per pound of nitrogen removed is likely to significantly underestimate the true cost-effectiveness of these projects.

Beyond cost-effectiveness, the bill also provides an immediate boost to our overall Bay restoration efforts by investing in just the right projects in just the right places. As the Department of Legislative Services reported last month, in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's most recent review of Maryland's progress toward our Bay restoration goals, the first "area of improvement" listed was "the State's implementation of BMPs for agriculture." EPA concluded that "the pace of progress in the agriculture sector will need to increase." Despite this, DLS noted that the primary source of funding for these very projects – the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share ("MACS") Program – "is not funded in fiscal 2026."

It is understandable during a budget crisis that the State will need to prioritize its spending. And that is just what this bill proposes to do: focus state spending on agricultural pollution reduction practices that are perhaps as effective and efficient as any other. This is exactly the sort of Bay restoration bill that is needed in this particular fiscal climate. For these and many other reasons cited by other supporters of this legislation, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 898.

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