

Senate Bill 168 – SUPPORT

Senate Bill 353 – Environmental Justice in CAD

My name is Leigh Whitmore-Priest. I live in the waterfront community of Rockview Beach, and my house is located on Rock Creek in Northern Anne Arundel County. I have grown up on the water and it was my families dream to eventually own waterfront property. When the COVID pandemic devastated my family with the death of my mother and severely disabling my brother we decided it was time to make a change in our lives. In the fall of 2020, we sold our house that we lived in for 23 years and bought a piece of property on Rock Creek. We spent a substantial portion of our savings to rebuild a house on a neglected piece of property. The transformation was profound. Not only did it improve the neighborhood that we lived in it also contributed to preserving the tidal wetlands.

This past fall we spent a significant amount of money to add rip rap to our shoreline to prevent land erosion and water pollution caused by run off. This home improvement project was scrutinized by the Maryland Department of Environment. I spent a significant amount of time and effort to obtain permits and a license to move forward with the work effort. In addition, I had to enter a contractual arrangement with the Maryland Department of Environment that contractually obligated me to protect the tidal wetlands and obtain approval before making any changes. I am perplexed on how the state can enforce such strict requirements on residents but can allow a toxic waste project past through legislation without vetting the initiative with the impacted residents and appropriate state representatives.

In the second quarter of 2023 I attended a town hall meeting in which the CAD project was first presented to the residents as well as the State of Maryland representatives. It was a very emotional meeting as residents feared for the lives of their families, children, neighbors, pets, wildlife, and waterways. It was the first time that anyone was informed of toxic elements being relocated to the water in which they swim, boat, and live. Many questions surfaced around the safety of the project which could not be properly addressed by the Maryland Port Authority and their experts. It was disclosed to the residents during the meeting that most of the permits and project approvals were obtained during COVID and that the purpose of the town hall meeting was to educate the community on the CAD project. The perception of the audience was that the Maryland Port Authority took advantage of a worldwide health matter and secretly obtained approvals during a time when most individuals were fighting for their lives. This is outrageous and unethical.

I have significant concerns with the safety of the CAD project and the wellbeing of my family and friends. We live on the water and eat the crabs as well as fish from our creek. It is no secret that there are carcinogens in the dredged water. My father worked at Bethlehem Steel and the shipyard for over 30 years, He suffered significantly from medical issues due to the exposure of toxic waste in the water. His medical conditions ranged from Mesothelioma, COPD, Congestive Heart failure and Leukemia. All confirmed diagnoses attributed to the exposure of toxic elements at the shipyard. This toxic material in the water has been dormant for decades. Disturbing the sea floor will reinstitute the toxic waste into flowing water that will impact the surrounding residents.

I am genuinely concerned about the quality and the scope of the Maryland Port Authority research regarding the CAD system and its safety. I am also significantly concerned that this project has accelerated through the approval process without collaborating with the Maryland Department of Environment as well as the lack of independent health, science, and environmental oversight of this project.

Due to the significant safety concerns outlined above it is critically important that the proposed Senate Bill 168 be moved into legislation.

Sincerely,

Leigh Whitmore-Priest

Rockview Beach