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Legislative District 12A  
Howard County

Health and Government Operations  
Committee

Subcommittees

Government Operations  
and Health Facilities

Public Health and  
Minority Health Disparities



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SUPPORT

House Bill 878 - Department of Environment-Nontidal Wetlands-Protection of Vernal Pools  
(Vernal Pools Wetlands Protection Act of 2025)

January 24, 2025

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environmental and Transportation Committee,

**HB878** strengthens existing protections for wetlands in Maryland to explicitly incorporate protections for vernal pools which are currently excluded from statutory protections as they are not “wetlands with a continuous surface connection to bodies that are ‘waters of the United States’ in their own right.” Federal protection under the Clean Water Act through 8 presidential administrations had negated the need for state action. Those protections were effectively lost with the 2023 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Sackett vs. Environmental Protection Agency rescinding EPA’s authority to do so as, by definition, vernal pools are not wetlands lying alongside “relatively permanent waterways... connected to traditional interstate navigable waters”. Because of the loss of federal protection, state action is needed to ensure this critical part of our ecological ecosystem is not irreparably damaged or lost.

Vernal pools are a specialized category of nontidal, seasonal depressional wetlands, typically water-filled from early winter through mid-summer and dry during other times of the year. Their unique, small-scale ecosystems contribute significantly to Maryland’s biodiversity by providing critical habitat and protection for breeding and raising offspring for species such as wood frogs, mole salamanders, fairy shrimp, and the endangered Tiger Salamander.

Vernal pools serve critical roles in mitigating environmental threats to human life through their ability to:

- Absorb stormwater, which reduces flooding and erosion.
- Filter out pollutants that enter waterways and drink water supplies, replenishing groundwater, and mitigating stormwater flows
- Remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, mitigating risks and impacts of climate change and improving air quality.

A lack of adequate regulatory protections and limited knowledge of their seasonal presence leaves vernal pools vulnerable to degradation and destruction. **HB878** addresses the former, better ensuring their preservation and upholding our responsibility and commitment to environmental stewardship, by requiring the establishment of comprehensive protections including surrounding buffers.

I urge a favorable report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terri Hill".