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Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and distinguished members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

For the record, I am Delegate Ryan Nawrocki, and I am joined by my colleague Delegate Kathy Szeliga, and we respectfully request a favorable report on HB 24 – Bay Restoration Fund – Authorized Uses – Connection to Existing Municipal Wastewater Facility.

This bill aims to address two critical issues: the Chesapeake Bay's health and our residents' well-being. HB 24 would allow qualifying homes with septic systems to access limited Chesapeake Bay Restoration Funds to connect to existing municipal sanitary sewer systems. As we know, the health of the Bay is vital to both our environment and our economy. Ensuring that safe, properly managed sewage connections are more accessible to replace failing septic systems where appropriate is a necessary step in protecting this essential resource.

Currently, it can be very difficult to access Chesapeake Bay Restoration Funds when the home is not located in the critical bay area. We have now had two instances in our district where neighborhoods have had difficulty accessing the Baltimore area sanitary sewer system because of costs. This bill would seek to allow broader access for these kinds of communities.

In many cases, when septic systems fail, the consequences go beyond just environmental degradation. These failures can result in serious health risks for residents. However, the cost of connecting to sewage lines remains out of reach for many, particularly for low-income homeowners. This bill would help alleviate that financial burden and prevent the greater costs—both financial and public health-related—that would arise if a septic system continued to fail for long periods.

We have deliberately kept the bill narrow in scope, focusing on certain income levels to ensure that the funds are used efficiently and for those who need them most. However, we must recognize the interconnectedness of our communities. A single septic system failure does not only affect one household—but can have far-reaching consequences for the surrounding area, including for residents who may not have the means to address any issues that arise. That is why we believe we must offer some flexibility in income levels, ensuring that those who live near existing municipal sewage systems can connect. One unique element of areas near the water is that they can often have very broad differences in income levels in homes that can be right across the street from each other. We believe that if the income threshold is set too low to qualify for these funds we may have a piecemeal approach created of some accessing sanitary sewer systems where not all link in which ultimately is not as beneficial to the health of the Bay.

February 3, 2025

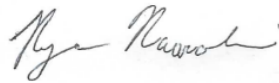
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We are also aware of the fiscal constraints that we are all working with. To address this, the bill prioritizes connections in areas where there are already existing sewage lines. While we certainly would like as many homes as possible to be able to connect to sanitary sewer systems, we believe that prioritizing neighborhoods with existing sewer infrastructure nearby allows us to target the lowest-hanging fruit more effectively and efficiently.

We would like to draw your attention to a specific provision in this bill that addresses a concern in our district. There is a wastewater treatment facility near Gunpowder Falls State Park, called the Richlyn Manor Wastewater Treatment Plant that has been scheduled for a transition to a pumping station for many years, but this has yet to occur. As such, we included language in the bill allowing residents to connect to existing facilities, regardless of their current performance such as the Richlyn Manor Wastewater Treatment facility to create discussion about this long failing facility. We have spoken with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) regarding this facility and are fully prepared to adjust this provision based upon our very productive discussions with MDE regarding the transition of this facility.

In conclusion, this bill is a balanced, thoughtful approach that will improve public health, protect the Chesapeake Bay, and provide critical support to residents seeking to connect to sanitary sewer systems. We urge you to give HB 24 a favorable report, as it will create lasting, positive impacts for our communities and the Bay.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Ryan Nawrocki
Delegate, District 7A



Kathy Szeliga
Delegate, District 7A