



Testimony on HB506 - Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act

Hearing Date: Thursday, March 6, 2025

Position: **FAVORABLE with Amendments**

Dear Chair Korman and members of the Education, Energy & the Environment Committee:

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and Potomac Riverkeeper Network respectfully request a **FAVORABLE with amendments** report on HB506. Waterkeepers Chesapeake's mission is to fight for clean water and a healthy environment for our local communities by supporting and representing Waterkeepers throughout the Chesapeake and Coastal Bay regions as they protect their communities, rivers, and streams from pollution.

We commend the administration for The Bay Legacy Act and wholeheartedly support the intent of the bill. As we are currently facing the 2025 targeted deadlines outlined in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement and uncertain environmental priorities set by the new administration at the Federal Level, we are at a pivotal point in considering the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays. SB428 takes a comprehensive step towards accelerating Maryland meeting water quality goals.

We submit this testimony in of support HB506 with these recommended amendments:

1. The Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) Report documents that current nonpoint source programs are not generating enough pollutant reductions to meet Bay water quality goals. We need to focus more on addressing the largest and most manageable sources of nutrients to the bay, agriculture. The Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) pilot program is an opportunity to more directly incorporate CESR's recommendations into Maryland's incentive programs. **We recommend amendments to the Environmental Goals so that the goals are more specifically defined based on existing environmental legislation such as the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, Tree Solutions Now Act, and Climate Solutions Now Act. Additionally, a steering committee or board should be established to work with the program administrator as they develop the program. Finally, to boost the Department of Agriculture's implementation of programs, this bill should authorize MDA to administer the 35% of the CWCA that goes to Agricultural projects annually.**

2. As local water quality advocates, Waterkeepers are enthusiastically supportive of elevating the need for more water quality data within the state to develop a deeper understanding of how we are meeting water quality improvement goals, the state of our aquatic resources, and to better inform management actions and public education. Among Maryland Waterkeepers alone, hundreds of stations are currently being monitored for parameters such as: dissolved oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, fecal bacteria, clarity, pH, and emerging chemicals of concern such as PFAS. Most of this data is certified by the Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative, a partnership of multiple organizations in the Chesapeake that provides technical and programmatic support to water quality monitoring programs in the watershed. Given this extensive historical data and existing resources being currently used by groups such as Waterkeepers, we encourage the Department to expand its access to water quality data by leaning on the expertise and experience of water monitoring groups. **We support the establishment of a water quality program within the Department of Natural Resources, and the proposed amendment to allow the incorporation of water quality monitoring data that meets the quality assurance and use goals of the state data sets.**
3. Maryland Waterkeepers support the addition of considering climatological factors when considering the management of species in the Bay. While we understand the intent to streamline management with Fishery Management Plans (FMP) created by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission or a Federal Regional Fishery Management Council, **we support amendments that would clarify that critical species to the Chesapeake Bay such as oysters and blue crabs not be left off the Fishery Management Plan list unintentionally.**
4. Maryland Waterkeepers enthusiastically support and engage in oyster restoration to benefit water quality, aquatic habitat, and support other fisheries and economy. However, because oyster restoration is an in-water best management practice, it does nothing to address the source of pollution. As such, allowing trading credits for oyster restoration projects may result in negatively impacting overburdened environmental justice communities. Localized effects from pollution should be offset with localized mitigation. We support oyster restoration efforts and any programming that may result in an increased oyster population in the Bay. **We recommend amendments to the act that any mitigation oyster restoration projects be implemented within the watershed for which they are offsetting pollution for, and ensure that environmental justice and equity goals are considered to avoid hotspots of pollution.**

We support the Bay Legacy Act but recommend strengthening it with amendments outlined in this testimony. We also support amendments as outlined in testimony from ShoreRivers. We believe that this legislation with our added recommendations is a good step in Maryland addressing the CESR report and reaching our restoration goals. We respectfully request a FAVORABLE with amendments report on HB506.

Sincerely,
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