

Testimony in Support of HB1175/SB0898
Nutrient Management – Tidal Buffer – Vegetative Buffers and Restriction on Fertilizer Application
House Environment and Transportation Committee 28 February 2025
Submitted on 26 February 2025 by 1:30 pm

To the Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Janet Ruhl. I live in Galena, MD, on the Sassafras River, and I urge a **favorable** report on HB1175/SB0898. Thank you in advance for your consideration of support.

Maryland's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is an effective federal state partnership program that pays landowners to take environmentally sensitive cropland out of production for 10 to 15 years and install conservation practices that protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat.

HB1175/SB0898 seeks to strengthen the effectiveness of CREP **by focusing on lands within 100 feet of Maryland tidal water**, a buffer zone which will maximize environmental benefits while minimizing loss of productive agricultural lands. Many of these near-shore lands are already experiencing pressures from climate impacts - surface and groundwater pollution, saltwater intrusion, and increasingly severe weather and rain events - which make farming productively a growing challenge. In addition, HB1175/SB0898 proposes to expand the program **to include tenant farmers**. According to census data, there are 3,309 farmers across the state who lease land for farming operations. Incentive programs need to compensate these farmers for the role they play as stewards of any farm in the Critical Area with implemented conservation buffers.

This Bill will:

- Authorize state cost-share funding be made available for installing a fixed natural buffer (riparian forest buffers, riparian herbaceous buffers, and wetlands) on land within the 100-foot tidal buffer on an agricultural operation. The fixed natural buffer must be constructed in accordance with technical specifications adopted by the Department of Agriculture.
- Prohibit a nutrient management plan renewed after July 1, 2025, from allowing a person to apply certain fertilizer to land within the 100-foot tidal buffer.
- Redefine eligible Agricultural Operations to include Leased Land Operators (i.e, tenant farmers).

Near-shore restoration is identified as a top priority in the Chesapeake Bay Program's Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) Report.

I **support** Bill HB1175/SB0898 strengthening the positive environmental impact of CREP by focusing on lands within 100 feet of tidal water and including tenant farmers. I am routinely boating and kayaking on the main stem and creeks of the Sassafras River and I have observed substantial loss of forest buffers. It is now common to see through buffers that used to look impenetrable and to observe farm operations occurring near the edges of the river.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look to this committee to give HB1175/SB0898 a **favorable** report.

Sincerely,
Janet C. Ruhl