



CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION

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Bill Report

Bill Number/Title: HB 1175 / Nutrient Management – Tidal Buffers – Vegetative Buffers and Restriction on Fertilizer Application

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Hearing: February 28, 2025

Position: Support

Background

HB 1175 increases and expands incentive payments for participation in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to create and maintain vegetative buffers along waterways in agricultural areas; it also provides special payments for buffer creation adjacent to waterways within 100 feet of tidal water. The bill also prohibits the application of fertilizer within 100 feet of tidal water, the same area for which enhancement conservation payments would now be available.

Position

The Maryland Legislative members of the Commission support HB 1175. The creation of forested or herbaceous buffers along waterways has been found to be one of the most cost-effective best management practices to limit the nutrient runoff to the Chesapeake Bay. The bill targets one of the most vulnerable areas of the Bay, the Critical Area, which is increasingly feeling the impacts of sea-level rise and saltwater intrusion.

A new and very innovative aspect of the provisions in the legislation is to allow payments to tenant farmers as part of the incentive provisions. A high percentage of land is farmed by non-owners, and this provision helps address this concern, which has been continually recognized as a road-block to achieving our water quality goals.

Throughout its existence, a focus of the Commission has been finding the Bay restoration approaches that would deliver the greatest impact at the lowest possible costs, the “biggest bang for the buck.” The provisions of this legislation amplify that approach, by creating enhanced payments for conservation in areas that deliver the highest nutrient loading to Maryland’s tidal waters.