



The Maryland Department of the Environment
Secretary Serena McIlwain

House Bill 878

Department of the Environment - Water Resources - Protection of Vernal Pools
(Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2025)

Position: Informational
Committee: Environment and Transportation
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From: Alex Butler, Deputy Director of Government Relations

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) offers the following **INFORMATIONAL** testimony on HB 878.

Bill Summary

House Bill 878 requires MDE to adopt regulations establishing protections for the preservation of vernal pools, including the establishment of buffers around vernal pools in Maryland.

Key Points

MDE currently has a very narrow role with respect to vernal pools where there is a clear water quality connection. House Bill 878 is a much broader bill seeking to capture all vernal pools (tidal and non-tidal) in the state.

The bill directly mentions habitat, biodiversity, and ecosystem protection as key reasons to regulate and protect vernal pools. MDE focuses on water quality and public health protections and lacks the necessary expertise, resources, and statutory authority to effectively implement a land preservation program of this nature. The bill would require MDE to create an entirely new program within the Water and Science Administration, diverting resources from existing regulatory functions and necessitating additional staff, funding, and legal support.

Finally, there is no current survey or mapping of vernal pools in Maryland but the total number is in the thousands. In order to adopt science-based and effective protections the extent and location of vernal pools would need to be mapped through a comprehensive survey effort.

MDE hopes this **INFORMATIONAL** testimony regarding HB 878 is helpful as the committee considers this legislation.

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