

HB 701 and SB 523

Department of the Environment – Nontidal Wetlands – Protection of
Vernal Pools
Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026

Testimony of Amanda DeLeo, **Favorable**

I am a Maryland Resident, Patapsco Heritage Greenway's Water Quality Program Manager, volunteer with Frog Watch Maryland, member of Vernal Pool Partners, and a Director of the Board on the Maryland Water Monitoring Council. I have a secondary science teaching certificate in Maryland, a Master's Degree from Towson University in Biology and a B.S. degree from UMBC in Interdisciplinary Studies (Environmental Science).

I urge you to consider enacting the Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026. In Maryland, vernal pools are being lost at a rapid rate because of the limited knowledge of their presence and the gap in wetlands protections. Therefore, Maryland should take this step of developing a list of qualified vernal pools (those supporting obligate species) that MDE will review when considering development permits

Vernal pools provide a disproportionate amount of important ecosystem services like slowing down and holding storm water. This is important because we already have lots of impervious surfaces (like roads) that shuttle water quickly to our rivers which can increase the intensity of flooding. Vernal pools help balance that out. Vernal pools also hold the water and filter it, which helps decrease sediment pollution and also helps to replenish groundwater.

Vernal Pools are essential for some species to exist. Some rare and some common species require this type of habitat to thrive and reproduce. Some use it because it's there but others actually *require this exact environment to survive and reproduce (obligate species)*.

These wetlands are temporary which is a distinguishing important factor (because fish can't live there), but also a challenge for protection. The area around the vernal pool is as important as the pool itself because that is the buffer for the pool and also is where the mole salamanders live most of the year, underground. They burrow through underground tunnels in the adjacent areas and use the pools for reproduction.

In addition to all the previously mentioned reasons, ***Vernal Pools are an important natural resource to humans and are available to all communities to observe*** regardless of native language, income, or education level.

The Time is Now. Vernal Pool Partners has worked closely with MDE for the past two years to revise **bill language that embraces a reasonable, move-at-a-reasonable-pace approach** adopted by nearby states. New York projects ***no significant fiscal impact*** of their vernal pool protections.