February 27, 2026

RE: SB 688 – Environment – Stream and Floodplain Restoration Projects – Requirements and Limitations

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Cooper Lee and I am a Maryland resident who cares deeply about the health of our local streams, groundwater, drinking water, and the Chesapeake Bay. I am writing to respectfully **oppose SB 688**.

I support strong environmental protections and science-based solutions to reduce pollution and restore degraded waterways. Regrettably, SB 688 would move Maryland in the opposite direction. Rather than improving environmental outcomes, this bill would sharply limit the tools that local governments, nonprofits, and restoration professionals rely on to fix damaged streams, reduce flooding, and meet long-standing clean water obligations and federal requirements.

In many developed and urban areas, upland stormwater controls alone are not enough. Streams have already been deeply altered by decades of runoff, nutrient pollution, erosion, and legacy sediment. Carefully designed stream and floodplain restoration projects are often the only practical way to stabilize channels, reconnect floodplains, slow floodwaters, improve groundwater recharge, and protect nearby homes, roads, and businesses. By broadly restricting in-stream restoration and disqualifying it from credit toward MS4 permits, TMDLs, and mitigation requirements, SB 688 would make it much harder to address flooding risks that already threaten private property, public infrastructure and human health.

I am particularly concerned about how this bill would affect drinking water, private wells, and groundwater availability. Large-scale water users, including data centers, place growing demands on Maryland's aquifers through continuous withdrawals. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Maryland residents rely on private wells as their sole source of drinking water. Stream and floodplain restoration helps slow runoff, increase infiltration, and naturally replenish groundwater supplies. Weakening these restoration tools risks reducing recharge, increasing competition for limited water resources, and making wells more vulnerable to failure or contamination—costs that fall directly on homeowners.

SB 688 would also have real economic consequences. Maryland has built a strong restoration economy that includes engineers, construction and maintenance crews, environmental scientists, nonprofit implementers, plant nurseries, material suppliers and small businesses that design, build, and maintain restoration projects. By limiting when and how stream restoration can be used, the bill would reduce demand for this work, threaten jobs, and shrink a homegrown industry that delivers environmental benefits while supporting local employment. It would also make Maryland less competitive for federal infrastructure, resilience, and clean water funding that depends on a clear, workable restoration framework.

Finally, the bill ignores Maryland's own recent work to improve restoration outcomes. The Maryland Department of the Environment's 2024 Ecological Restoration Permitting Study recommended better standards, monitoring, and accountability—not sweeping statutory prohibitions. SB 688 replaces a flexible, science-driven approach with rigid limits that fail to reflect real-world conditions and local needs.

For all of these reasons, I implore you to give SB 688 an **UNFAVORABLE** report. Maryland should continue refining and improving restoration practices—not eliminating essential tools that reduce flooding, protect property, safeguard drinking water and private wells and human health, support local jobs, and restore the Chesapeake Bay.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cooper Lee
Silver Spring, Montgomery County, MD