



**Testimony in SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of SB0036 – Silver and Starter Homes
Act of 2026**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 17, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of SB0036**.

We know that clean water policy begins with land use policy, and how we choose to develop and conserve our lands has lasting impacts to our environment and the Chesapeake Bay.

While we strongly support the underlying goal of increasing affordable housing supply across the State of Maryland, SB0036, as originally introduced, made significant changes to land use policy that could have inadvertently incentivized the kind of sprawling development of rural and natural landscapes that we have long known is harmful to our environment, our land conservation goals, and our Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

We want to sincerely thank the Department of Housing and Community Development for working collaboratively and transparently with us over the past few weeks and we strongly support the following Department amendments:

On page 8, in line 24, strike “or”.

On page 8, after line 26, insert: “;

(IV) LAND WITHIN THE CHESAPEAKE AND ATLANTIC COASTAL BAYS CRITICAL AREA, AS DEFINED IN § 8-1802 OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES ARTICLE; OR

(V) FORESTED LAND SUITABLE FOR FOREST INTERIOR DWELLING SPECIES, AS DEFINED IN § 5-1607(C)(1)(III) OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES ARTICLE.”

-These amendments will ensure that the Critical Area and our largest forests with prescribed protections in the Forest Conservation Act (typically greater than 50 or even 100 acres in size) will not be inadvertently impacted by pollution and habitat fragmentation that could occur from increased development activity.

We remain concerned that the bill removes impervious surface area limits (lot coverage maximums) across a wide area of the State. These limits have long formed the foundation of protections for our environment and our communities from stormwater pollution and stormwater flooding. For that reason, we urge the committee to adopt the additional following amendment:

On page 9, line 6, strike in its entirety lines 6 and 7.

-This amendment strikes the bill's prohibition on counties setting maximum lot coverage limits. These coverage limits have always formed a key component of land use regulations that limits the proliferation of impervious surfaces, thus limiting land disturbance, avoiding future stormwater flooding from development, and avoiding future pollution to our rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

Thank you for considering the amendments put forth by the Department and our additional amendment described herein, and for working collaboratively toward our shared goal of delivering land use solutions that work for our communities, our lands, our rivers, and our Chesapeake Bay.

Sincerely,

Elle Bassett, South, West, and Rhode
Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

Kathy Gramp, President
Advocates for Herring Bay

Taylor Swanson, Executive Director and
Assateague Coastkeeper
Assateague Coastal Trust

Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Blue Water Baltimore

Dr. Allison Colden, Maryland Executive
Director
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Evan Isaacson, Senior Attorney and Director of
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Sara Caldes, Severn Riverkeeper
Chesapeake Rivers Association, Inc.

Marisa Olszewski, Community and Environment
Manager
Maryland League of Conservation Voters

Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper and
Program Director
Potomac Riverkeeper Network

Josh Falk, Executive Director
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Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper
ShoreRivers

Robin Broder, Acting Executive Director
Waterkeepers Chesapeake