



Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay
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*Deeply rooted in native plants,
promoting native landscapes
through education, advocacy and
collaborative action.*

Testimony: SB0036, Land Use - Zoning - Limitations (Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026)

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Chair - Brian Feldman; Vice Chair, Cheryl Kagan, and honorable members of the Committee:

Located in Southern Maryland, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay¹, a 71-member chapter of the national organization Wild Ones², strives to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities across Southern Maryland. We **strongly urge you to oppose this bill** for the risks it will bring to our local ecosystems, including the native plants and creatures (biodiversity) that call Maryland home. We must take every step we can to save our treasured Chesapeake Bay and its watershed for future generations.

Higher-density housing as proposed by this bill has negative impacts on local ecosystems and their biodiversity including:

- **Loss of Natural Environments:** More housing means less forested areas. From 1999 to 2019, Maryland lost approximately 6,000 acres of forest each year due to development, totaling around 118,000 acres over that two-decade period. Recent studies indicate that while the rate of loss has slowed, development remains a significant cause of forest loss in the state.³
- **Increased Stormwater Runoff:** Allowing for smaller lots (down to 5,000 square feet) and reduced setbacks for townhomes and single-family homes increases density in existing areas. This will increase impervious surfaces, adding stress to our aging water and sewer systems, and contributing to higher stormwater runoff and its pollutants entering the Chesapeake Bay.
- **Storm Management Infrastructure Strain:** The legislation does not provide exemptions for areas with existing infrastructure constraints, which could lead to increased pressure on local storm management systems.
- **Reduced Local Environmental Control:** By limiting the ability of local governments to regulate lot coverage and building dimensions, the legislation reduces the effectiveness of local environmental standards that manage green space and environmental setbacks.

While we support efforts to help young families and seniors who earn too much to qualify for assistance and cannot afford to buy a home, we do not believe this bill will solve it. This bill moves away from respecting local control over zoning and land-use decisions by taking authority away from counties and imposing one-size-fits-all rules that do not reflect local conditions. Southern Maryland residents care deeply about local decision-making, and over the years the counties have developed creative, balanced solutions with limited state interference. This legislation would significantly and negatively change the relationship between the State and local governments.

Thank you for your time and for considering the real impacts this legislation would have on Southern Maryland and similar communities across Maryland.

Marlene Smith, President, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay

¹Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay Chapter, <https://chesapeakebay.wildones.org/>

²Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, LTD, a nationwide nonprofit organization with local chapters throughout the country, including 5 chapters in Maryland, <https://wildones.org/>

³ https://www.bayjournal.com/news/growth_conservation/maryland-still-losing-forests-and-trees-though-at-a-slower-rate-study-finds/article_b1ddd3b0-675e-11ed-9ea9-072671365ff9.html