



SB0523

**Department of the Environment - Water Resources - Protection of Vernal Pools
(Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)**

Testimony before Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Hearing February 24, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Peter Alexander, and I represent the 1700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today in support of SB523, the **Vernal Pool Wetland Protection Act**, which will protect an important ephemeral but vital ecosystem in Maryland. We thank Senator Washington for introducing this bill.

Vernal pools are unique, small seasonal wetland ecosystems that support biodiversity including state-endangered tiger salamander. They provide vital ecosystem services such as replenishing groundwater and filtering stormwater and are often overlooked and filled or poorly managed. Vernal pools are being lost at a rapid rate because they often do not meet current MDE wetlands regulations or qualify for federal protections under the interpreted Clean Water Act.

Numerous state- and nationally-recognized environmental organizations support this legislation, including among others, the Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, Anacostia Watershed Society, Audubon Mid-Atlantic, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy.

The **Vernal Pool Wetland Protection Act** will protect qualified vernal pools and their buffers which are not currently protected as nontidal wetlands in the State. It will designate qualified vernal pools as those supporting amphibian and invertebrate species that require these pools to survive. It will also leverage existing nontidal wetlands permitting and mitigation programs for cost-effective implementation.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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