



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 523 – Department of the Environment -Water Resources  
– Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)**

February 24, 2026

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB523** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection organization on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. *Our mission is to protect Maryland’s Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.*

This legislation **requires the Maryland Department of the Environment to adopt regulations that identify and protect vernal pools and similar seasonal wetlands throughout the state.** Vernal pools are critical, and increasingly-rare, natural infrastructure for clean water and ecosystem health. They are seasonal pools that recharge groundwater, reduce runoff pollution, and provide critical habitat for hundreds of aquatic species including salamanders, frogs, and shrimp. **Data collected during the Maryland Biological Stream Survey documented more than 57,521 seasonal pools in the state of Maryland, with the highest concentrations being on the Eastern Shore, where there is an average of 11.66 pools per stream mile<sup>1</sup>.** This number likely underestimates the true number of vernal pools, given their seasonal nature and gaps in current monitoring protocols. The Eastern Shore is also home to a particularly rare type of seasonal pool known as a Delmarva Bays.

Unfortunately, due to recent rollbacks of the Clean Water Act at the federal level, many seasonal pools such as vernal pools and Delmarva Bays are no longer protected, which leaves them open to development pressures and destruction by industry. **SB523 will not only improve monitoring protocols for seasonal pools, but, most importantly, it will ensure that these crucial and endangered habitats are afforded the same protections as other waterways.** It is especially important for Maryland to step up and restore protections to vernal pools in the absence of federal leadership. Vernal pools play an important, but often-forgotten, role in local water quality, and are under increasing threat from climate change.

For these reasons, ShoreRivers **urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 523** and encourages the legislature to support policies that invest in watershed health and resilient natural systems across Maryland, especially on the Eastern Shore.

Sincerely,  
**Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper** on behalf of:

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<sup>1</sup> Results from Round 3 of the Maryland Biological Stream Survey (2007-2009)  
<https://dnr.maryland.gov/streams/Documents/MBSSR3Report.pdf>

**ShoreRivers**

Scott Budden, Executive Director

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