



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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March 31, 2026

BILL NUMBER: **HOUSE BILL 254 - THIRD READER**

SHORT TITLE: **SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ADAPTATION ACT**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **SUPPORT**

**EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION**

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The Department supports House Bill 254. Maryland is being transformed by sea level rise and devastating inland floods. The state needs to implement actions to address these changes to support local adaptation and build resilience. Much of the burden of planning for and adapting to climate change impacts is felt at the local-level where flooding, coastal erosion, and sea level rise are experienced regularly. This bill allows for greater program efficiency, strengthened partnerships, and helps advance nature-based resilience programs. It shifts in priorities that will enhance DNR's ability to effectively deliver restoration and adaptation outcomes and including community input without requiring additional resources.

HB254 directs the Department to streamline its data and resources into accessible formats for local climate planning. Providing necessary support through training and guidance will ensure municipalities can integrate DNR data into localized adaptation strategies.

Additionally, the bill makes the popular pilot program known as the Resilience Through Restoration Initiative, or "RtR" and the proposed changes to the Shore Erosion Control Construction Loan Fund, existing barriers will be removed or reduced in access to technical assistance and resources to implement nature-based resilience projects. HB254 also clarifies the Department's ability to compensate community members for their input and guidance on state projects. Systemic barriers—such as financial strain, childcare needs, and a history of mistrust— can often prevent these residents from participating in community outreach efforts. By compensating community members for their time and local expertise, the state can overcome these obstacles and ensure project development is not only inclusive, but effective.

Finally, HB254 sets up an initiative within DNR to implement nature-based adaptation projects on Department lands to serve as strategic demonstrations of climate resilience. Since Maryland's public lands already provide vital benefits—including heat regulation, stormwater management, carbon sequestration, and improved public health—these targeted projects will showcase how the state can protect cultural heritage, create opportunities for outdoor recreation, and enhance biodiversity while adapting to a rapidly changing environment.

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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The Resilience Through Restoration Initiative or “RtR” launched in 2017 as a pilot program with an ambitious goal of implementing at least 15 nature-based demonstration projects that would address escalating risks from extreme weather and climate-related events. The program has overachieved in its initial project goal and to date has supported the design and construction of 41 projects across Maryland. Of these projects, 16 have been constructed, and construction underway for 5 additional projects, expected to be complete by the end of 2026.

The RtR Initiative successfully leveraged the initial state investment of \$17.25 million over seven years with over \$13.7 million in federal, state and local funding. The program is essential in helping Maryland communities compete successfully for highly competitive federal dollars. The demand for the program has also grown, with annual funding requests from our communities and partners surging from \$1.2 million in FY18 to more than \$31.5 million in FY25. With investments in resilience and restoration supporting 33 jobs per \$1 million invested and saving \$6 on disaster recovery to every \$1 invested, the program is an effective and fiscally responsible program to build community and ecosystem resilience.

DNR’s Shoreline Conservation Service (SCS) provides technical assistance and loans through the Shore Erosion Control Construction Loan Fund to private landowners to design and implement living shoreline projects. With 90% of the shoreline in private ownership, SCS has responded to over 1,800 technical assistance requests since 2022, with nearly 80% of those from individual landowners. While the loan program has been successful in the past, the loan formula in current law hasn’t been updated since 1988 and is a barrier for many looking to participate in the program.

## **BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill will make several targeted changes to help improve the Department’s ability to support resilience throughout the state, including:

1. **Increase community participation in state projects:** The legislation clarifies the Department’s ability to transfer funding (via contractual agreements) to partner organizations to financially compensate community members for their participation in state-led projects. Compensation enables marginalized communities to overcome obstacles to participation, facilitating diverse input on state initiatives.
2. **Codify Resilience through Restoration:** As a permanent program of the Department, Resilience through Restoration can continue to support community adaptation by requesting and spending federal dollars (and future state dollars) through the program.
3. **Deliver Department data to support local adaption:** The legislation tasks the Department to develop training and guidance to support local governments in integrating state tools and resources into local adaptation planning.
4. **Lower barriers to living shoreline financing:** The legislation provides the Department with the ability to modify the formula associated with the “Shore Erosion Control Construction Loan Fund” to improve access. It also authorises the department to allow loan forgiveness based on certain criteria.
5. **Demonstrate nature-based adaptation:** The legislation requires the Department to identify climate vulnerabilities and risks on two coastal and two inland state owned properties in order to implement projects that will address climate risks. Implemented projects will serve as demonstrations of nature-based climate adaptation that bolster ecological value, community resilience, and potential co-benefits.