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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 686

PFAS Chemicals – Product Phase Outs and Registration Requirements

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brent Walls, and I serve as the Program Director and Upper Potomac Riverkeeper for Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Our organization works across Maryland and the greater Potomac watershed to protect clean water, public health, and the communities that depend on them.

I write in strong support of Senate Bill 686, legislation that takes an important and practical step to reduce PFAS pollution by phasing out intentionally added PFAS in common consumer products and establishing clear product registration requirements.

PFAS are a class of thousands of highly persistent chemicals. They are designed not to break down, and as a result, they accumulate in our environment, our drinking water, wildlife, and in the human body. Decades of research show that exposure to certain PFAS is associated with serious health harms, including immune suppression, thyroid disruption, liver disease, developmental impacts, and cancer. These impacts are particularly concerning because PFAS exposures are widespread, and nearly the entire population has measurable PFAS in their blood.

Maryland is already dealing with PFAS contamination in drinking water and in waterways. But one of the most effective strategies to address PFAS is also the simplest: stop adding PFAS to products when those uses are not essential and safer alternatives exist.

SB 686 does exactly that. The bill phases out intentionally added PFAS in products that Marylanders use every day, including cleaning products, cookware, cosmetics, personal care products, juvenile products, feminine hygiene products, and other consumer goods. These are not rare specialty items. They are products that families bring into their homes and use in close contact with their bodies.

Importantly, SB 686 is structured in a thoughtful and phased way. It provides clear timelines for phase-outs, requires product registration and disclosure so regulators and the public can understand where PFAS are being used, and gives the Maryland Department of the Environment



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the authority to identify “currently unavoidable uses” where PFAS may still be essential for health, safety, or the functioning of society and where alternatives are not reasonably available.

This approach aligns with the widely recognized “essential-use concept,” which has been developed specifically for PFAS. Research shows that PFAS uses in many consumer products are often relatively easy to replace and are frequently non-essential, while a smaller number of highly specialized industrial uses may require more detailed technical evaluation. SB 686 reflects this distinction by targeting the most substitutable product categories first while creating a transparent process for evaluating any claimed exemptions.

SB 686 also strengthens accountability by establishing a Maryland PFAS Chemicals Protection and Remediation Fund. This is critical because PFAS pollution creates long-term costs for testing, monitoring, cleanup, and public health protection. When we fail to regulate PFAS at the product level, those costs are shifted onto taxpayers, communities, and downstream water users. A dedicated fund helps ensure Maryland has the resources to respond to contamination and support remediation.

Potomac Riverkeeper Network strongly supports the goals and structure of SB 686. This bill reduces future PFAS pollution at the source, improves transparency, and helps Maryland move away from preventable PFAS uses in everyday products.

Maryland has long been a leader in water quality protection. SB 686 is an opportunity to continue that leadership by addressing PFAS in a way that is proactive, practical, and rooted in the best available science.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 686.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brent Walls
Program Director & Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper Network