



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 164 – Natural Resources -Pamela J. Kelly Tree-Mendous Maryland Program - Alterations

January 27, 2026

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB164** 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 **strengthens the Pamela J. Kelly Tree-Mendous Maryland Program by expanding its purpose to include the advancement of forest health and resilience through the promotion and maintenance of native trees and shrubs on public lands, community spaces, schools, and rights-of-way.** Forests and tree canopy are essential natural infrastructure for clean water and healthy communities. Trees absorb stormwater, reduce runoff pollution, filter airborne pollutants, and provide critical habitat for wildlife. For communities throughout the Eastern Shore and Chesapeake Bay watershed, expanding tree planting and maintenance efforts is a **proven, cost-effective strategy to improve water quality and resilience to climate impacts** such as erosion and increasingly-severe weather events.

ShoreRivers' on-the-ground restoration efforts consistently demonstrate that projects incorporating trees yield measurable water quality improvements and community benefits. ShoreRivers works with volunteers, students, landowners, and municipalities on tree planting and watershed stewardship initiatives throughout our region. We regularly see firsthand how access to healthy, native plantings engages citizens in environmental action and enhances local landscapes. Unfortunately, a major challenge to the continued success of these restoration projects is the lack of available funding for maintenance activities to ensure that these plantings are effective beyond the term of the grant funding used to install them. **By broadening the existing Tree-Mendous program's purpose to explicitly include resilience and maintenance, SB164 aligns program priorities with community needs and environmental changes.** It builds upon an already successful statewide initiative and creates a stronger foundation for interagency partnerships, community engagement, and long-term ecological success.

For these reasons, ShoreRivers **urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 164** and encourages the legislature to support policies that invest in tree canopy, watershed health, and resilient natural systems across Maryland.

Sincerely,
Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper