



February 23, 2026

**Natural Resources - Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park (HB959)  
Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and honorable members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore is a local nonprofit organization with a mission to protect and restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **On behalf of Blue Water Baltimore, I write to express our strong support for HB 959 – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park .**

Blue Water Baltimore, home of the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, is part of the global Waterkeeper Alliance that is composed of over 300 watchdog organizations with a mission to protect and restore waterways all over the world. Our licensed Waterkeeper jurisdiction includes the entirety of the Patapsco and Back River watersheds, which means that Blue Water Baltimore is uniquely positioned among environmental NGOs in the region to focus on the health and prosperity of these waterways, and that of the people who live, work, and recreate around them.

Gwynns Falls Leakin Park is one of the largest urban woodland parks in North America. At more than 1,200 acres, it represents an extraordinary natural, historical, and cultural asset, not only for Baltimore City residents, but for all Marylanders.

Blue Water Baltimore has been monitoring water quality in the Baltimore region for the past fifteen years, and we have seen the impact of public attention and care on the ecosystem. Our monitoring data from Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park tell us that stormwater, trash, and sewage pollution are major concerns in the park; but long-term trends are also telling us that **we have the power to heal the stream by investing in the upland strategies to protect our local waterways.**

We also know that **people care about and steward what they love**; the opportunity to raise the profile of this gem of the State would have benefits "downstream" in many ways. There is already evidence of the value of Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park in the numerous volunteers and partners who have been working for decades to raise its profile and protect its assets. The park is an invaluable resource and living classroom that we have used to educate the community about the impact of stormwater on water quality. We have done this through experiential programming such as stream clean ups, sewage hunting expeditions, water bug surveys, and more.

Despite its immense ecological and recreational value, Leakin Park has long suffered from underinvestment, limited state-level visibility, and a public perception shaped more by stigma

919 West 34th St., P.O. Box 4863 • Baltimore, MD 21211 • [www.BlueWaterBaltimore.org](http://www.BlueWaterBaltimore.org)



than by its true character. Designating the park as a Maryland State Park would bring transformative benefits:

**1. Environmental Stewardship and Protection**

State park designation would ensure stronger long-term conservation of forests, waterways, and wildlife habitats within the Gwynns Falls watershed. Increased state resources could support invasive species management, trail restoration, and environmental education programs.

**2. Public Safety and Infrastructure Improvements**

With Maryland Park Service oversight, the park could benefit from improved signage, trail maintenance, ranger presence, and visitor amenities. These enhancements would increase public safety and accessibility while encouraging greater community use.

**3. Economic and Community Revitalization**

As a state park, Leakin Park could become a regional destination for hiking, biking, birdwatching, and heritage tourism. Increased visitation would support nearby neighborhoods and small businesses while fostering positive engagement with one of Baltimore's most significant green spaces.

**4. Equity in Access to Nature**

Baltimore City residents deserve the same level of access to well-funded, high-quality natural spaces that communities across Maryland enjoy. Elevating Leakin Park to state park status would demonstrate Maryland's commitment to environmental equity and urban investment.

Leakin Park is not simply open land; it is a living ecosystem, a historic landscape, and a place of renewal for thousands of residents. With thoughtful planning and state partnership, it can become a flagship example of urban conservation done right.

For the reasons outlined above, we respectfully ask that you support this effort and return a favorable report on HB959.

Sincerely,

Barbara Johnson  
Sr. Manager of Water Protection & Community Advocacy  
Blue Water Baltimore  
bjohnson@bluewaterbaltimore.org