

TERRI L. HILL, M.D.

*Legislative District 12A
Howard County*

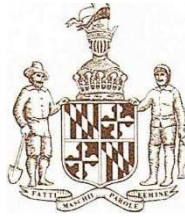
Health and Government Operations Committee

Subcommittees

Public Health and Minority Health Disparities, Chair

Elder and Long-Term Care

Maternal, Infant, and Child Health



*Annapolis Office
6 Bladen Street
Room 404
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

410-841-3378 · 301-858-3378
800-492-7122 Ext. 3378
Fax 410-841-3197 · 301-858-3197

Terri.Hill@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SUPPORT

House Bill 701 – Department of the Environment – Protection of Vernal Pools
(Vernal Pools Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)

February 18, 2026

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environmental and Transportation Committee,

HB701 proposes the next step in re-establishing protections for Maryland vernal pools that were reduced or lost with the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2020 rule changes regarding definitions and interpretations under the 1972 Clean Water Act. While facilitating energy infrastructure and gas pipeline projects, these actions threatened fragile waterways such as vernal pools, their watershed ecosystems, and animals who heavily rely on them for breeding and life.

The bill directs the Department of the Environment to adopt regulations for protective buffer areas for identified vernal pools in the State and requires the Department to also protect them from certain regulated activities.

Vernal pools, shallow freshwater wetlands and ephemeral streams, provide homes for invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and are essential for breeding and raising multiple species that are considered highly threatened. Significant breeding grounds provided for multiple aquatic species such as wood frogs, spotted salamanders, Jefferson salamanders, and fairy shrimp and support Eastern spadefoot toads, and spring peppers.

Due to the loss of federal protection, it is crucial for the State to act and ensure protection of our ecological systems.

I urge a favorable report on **HB701**

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