

March 25, 2026

To: MD House Committee on Environment and Transportation

Subject: HB 701 (SB 523)- Department of the Environment - Water Resources - Protection of Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members,

Please SUPPORT House Bill 701 to protect vernal pools in Maryland.

Vernal pools are isolated, seasonal wetlands of critical importance to hundreds of native plant and animal species and maintaining hydrological balance. Despite their importance, vernal pools in Maryland are threatened by rapid land development, stream “restoration” projects and forest loss.

Although the federal Clean Water Act protects some wetlands, isolated and seasonal wetlands such as vernal pools were deemed unworthy and **are no longer protected at the federal level**. US Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 (dredge and fill) wetlands permits issued by the Maryland Department of Environment do not cover vernal pools and therefore could be destroyed. Therefore, **Maryland regulations to protect these wetlands is urgent**.

I lived in New Mexico for many years. In that region, isolated ephemeral wetlands known as playas provide critical seasonal habitat and aquifer recharge. Despite their importance, many playas have already been lost and more are under threat by land conversion, oil and gas activities, sedimentation, altered hydrology and plain ignorance. New Mexico recognized that in the absence of federal level protection it must protect its remaining playa wetlands and has passed **strong state level regulations**.

Likewise, in the absence of federal protection, **Maryland must protect its vernal pools at the state level**.

**Please support HB 701.**

Thank you.

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