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March 1, 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair and
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401 – 1991

Re: SB0737 The Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act of 2021

Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay is writing in support of the proposed SB0737, Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act of 2021. For the last 50 years, the Alliance has brought together communities, companies, and conservationists to restore the lands and waters of the Chesapeake Bay. While public and philanthropic funding has helped move the needle on restoration progress over the last few decades, it is critically important to attract private capital and financing to the effort, in order to achieve the most equitable and efficient outcomes for the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The proposed Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act would place Maryland squarely on the map as a state leading the way in innovative restoration that engages both the public, philanthropic and private sector investments more deeply in this work. The Alliance is supportive of all efforts to increase the capital available to perform restoration work in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

From our perspective, this proposed legislation provides the following opportunities to the state of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay:

- Defines ‘blue infrastructure’ and puts both blue and green infrastructure on the same footing for state financing as traditional gray infrastructure practices.
- Provides more opportunities for green infrastructure projects such as forest and tree planting by making them eligible for MDE state revolving fund loans, grants, and loan guarantees.
- Helps to accelerate the permitting and installation of green infrastructure projects through the creation of a green infrastructure and restoration commission.
- Expands the ability of many Maryland state agencies to contract for work utilizing competitively procured Pay for Success contracts where private capital is put at risk if environmental outcomes are not achieved, and which helps drive innovation, speed of delivery, and price reduction of projects.

- Enhances many opportunities for land owners to participate in voluntary carbon markets, including creating working groups through DNR and Department of Agriculture to explore programming to assist, and amending state laws to enable easier access to these markets.
- Creates a cross-state funding mechanism for watershed and conservation projects in the Pennsylvania portion of the Susquehanna watershed which will assist in accelerating water pollution improvements there.

We applaud the efforts of this legislation to incorporate equity as a critical piece of restoration work moving forward. This legislation requests the state's Environmental Justice Commission to recommend actions needed to create a human right to affordable, clean water, following California's lead. Recognizing the intersection of equity in this work, this bill prioritizes areas that have been historically marginalized, and seeks to provide co-benefits of on the ground restoration benefits for the benefit of our Maryland communities.

The timing on the introduction of this bill is incredibly important, as State and County revenues are down and the prioritization of increased spending to protect the health of all Marylanders has increased. The Alliance applauds the collective efforts that resulted in the introduction of this bill – it is a critical investment for a brighter future for cleaner water for all Maryland residents, and for those further downstream in the Chesapeake.

The Alliance is appreciative of your efforts on behalf of the residents of the state of Maryland via innovative solutions for protection and restoration of our priceless natural resources. Please reach out with any comments or questions – I can be reached at KFritz@allianceforthebay.org or 443-926-1111 (cell).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kate Fritz".

Kate Fritz, Chief Executive Officer
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

CC: Senator Jim Rosapepe
Senator Guy Guzzone
Senator Sarah Elfreth
Senator Will Smith
Senator Ron Young