

HOUSE BILL 729

M3, M1

4lr2113

By: **Delegates Hill, McComas, Taylor, Terrasa, and Williams**

Introduced and read first time: January 29, 2024

Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Department of the Environment – Nontidal Wetlands – Protection of Vernal**
3 **Pools**
4 **(Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024)**

5 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of the Environment to adopt regulations to
6 protect and preserve vernal pools in the State; requiring the Department to complete
7 a plan for identifying vernal pools in the State; and generally relating to the
8 regulatory protection and preservation of nontidal wetlands and vernal pools in the
9 State.

Preamble

11 WHEREAS, Vernal pools are a specialized category of nontidal wetlands that are
12 typically water-filled from early winter through midsummer; and

13 WHEREAS, Vernal pools are unique, small-scale ecosystems that contribute
14 significantly to the biodiversity of Maryland by providing habitat for species that cannot
15 reproduce in alternative habitats, including the wood frog, mole salamanders, and fairy
16 shrimp; and

17 WHEREAS, Vernal pools provide a significant amount of ecosystem services as they
18 occur frequently throughout Maryland and have the capacity to replenish groundwater and
19 filter stormwater flows; and

20 WHEREAS, Vernal pools are threatened due to limited knowledge of their seasonal
21 presence and the lack of regulatory protections; now, therefore,

22 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
23 That:

24 (a) The Department of the Environment shall adopt regulations to:

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (1) establish protections related to the preservation of vernal pools in the
2 State;

3 (2) establish protections for 100-foot buffers around vernal pools in the
4 State; and

5 (3) define vernal pools as seasonal wetlands that support at least one
6 amphibian species.

7 (b) In adopting the regulations required under subsection (a) of this section, the
8 Department shall develop a plan for identifying vernal pools in the State, including the
9 number and location of vernal pools in the State.

10 (c) On or before October 1, 2025, the Department shall report its plan for vernal
11 pools completed in accordance with subsection (b) of this section to the Governor and, in
12 accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.

13 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
14 October 1, 2024.