

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH  
*Legislative District 30*  
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

*Subcommittees*

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

*Senate Chair*

Joint Committee on Administrative,  
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and  
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 103  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3578 · 301-858-3578  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578  
Fax 410-841-3156 · 301-858-3156  
Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2021

**Testimony in Favor of SB925  
Workgroup on Public Water Access**

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 925, legislation to create a Workgroup on Public Water Access to broadly study and reexamine our State's public water access opportunities and develop recommendations for State and Local governments to increase water access in our State.

We can all agree that one of Maryland's greatest treasures is the Chesapeake Bay and its surrounding tributaries -- it is a vital aspect of our culture, history, and economy. It is imperative that this General Assembly ensure that Marylanders in each and every corner of the State have equitable and readily available access to the waters of our Bay. By providing increased public access we can continue to build the relationship between citizens and our waters, ensuring that our common goals of restoring the health of the Bay remains a top priority for all.

The need for this bill is even more urgent as demand for public water access has never been higher -- the COVID-19 pandemic has caused Marylanders to increasingly seek opportunities for outdoor engagement. In a recent Chesapeake Conservancy Conservation Innovation Center Report, park utilization during the COVID-19 pandemic increased by 86.97%<sup>1</sup>. It is my hope that this desire for increased access does not fade away once this pandemic is concluded, and in turn we must ensure that we do all we can to expand public water access for the future.

Additionally, we also must recognize that every Marylander does not have equal access to our waters -- and for far too many minority and low income communities, access to the Bay is not available. My District is a victim of this very issue where a majority of waterfront property - once communities of color - is now privately owned and not available to all. In this year of social action to ensure equity in our State, this legislation will bring groups to the table and build recommendations that equitably increase access.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/2020/07/22/chesapeake-conservancy-studies-park-mobility-during-covid-19/>

This legislation is perfectly timed with federal action. The Great American Outdoors Act was signed into law in August and will ensure a significant increase in funding for public green spaces. In 2013, the National Park Service published a report on public water access in watershed states - that report, linked below, found that Maryland has 7,719 miles of shoreline but only 629 public access sites. The NPS report also highlighted the need for increased public water access in Baltimore County, Anne Arundel County, and on the Eastern Shore<sup>2</sup>.

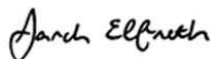
With this demand and urgency in mind, we have an opportunity to form a representative work group of stakeholders to convene and make recommendations on policy actions we can take at a State and local level to expand public water access. This legislation calls for such a work group to be staffed by the Chesapeake Bay Trust, of experts and community representatives.

This workgroup is charged with:

1. Examining our current public water access opportunities and the quality, geographic diversity, and equity of public water access sites.
2. Studying whether public water access opportunities can be increased through conservation of land, coordination with federal agencies, or opening more areas.
3. Studying and recommending infrastructure upgrades that will increase the activation - such as kayak launches, fishing piers, or picnic tables - of public water access sites.
4. Exploring new water access opportunities with a focus on accessibility and transportation availability, and
5. Developing a list of policy tools that State and local governments may use to expand public water access.

The Chesapeake Bay is too great a treasure to privatize. This General Assembly has taken incredible action to restore and protect the health of the Bay - we must do more to ensure all Marylanders can also enjoy this national treasure. I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 945.

Sincerely,



Sarah Elfreth

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://federalleadership.chesapeakebay.net/Public\\_Access\\_Plan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://federalleadership.chesapeakebay.net/Public_Access_Plan_FINAL.pdf)