



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB204– Environment and Natural Resources –  
Complaints, Inspections, and Enforcement – Information Maintenance and Reporting**

January 25, 2021

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB204** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with 3,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

HB204 will update the process that Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) uses to receive, process, record and report environmental complaints and violations.

As a Riverkeeper organization, ShoreRivers commonly receives complaints from citizens about environmental violations. On the Eastern Shore, due to a combination of increasing development, sea level rise, and increasing frequency and intensity of rainfall, we are receiving **an increasing number of citizen complaints on environmental violations**. The most common complaints center around issues with unpermitted clearing in the Critical Area, sediment plumes associated with construction sites, fisheries violations, and unpermitted shoreline work. We consistently document and report environmental violations to the appropriate agencies with little to no meaningful enforcement actions. Unfortunately, as we experience an increasing number of complaints our regulatory agencies do not have the resources to adequately enforce or address environmental violations. **MDE has lost 13% of their positions and DNR has lost 17.5% of their positions across the state over the last 20 years**. With already limited staff, updating the process for complaints, inspections and enforcements will create efficiencies that will lead to more meaningful enforcement actions.

HB204 will improve government transparency and accountability through frequent reporting, and it will assist the agencies with prioritizing and resolving enforcement actions, especially for those “significant noncompliance” or “high-priority violations.”

As Riverkeepers, we monitor the compliance history for facilities that have National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits (NPDES), or “discharge permits” under MDE as a regulated tool to meet water quality standards. As of 2019, **44% of the active discharge permits in the state have a permit status of “expired” or “administratively continued”**, meaning they have not been updated since the permit was last issued. In one case, a chicken rendering plant in Dorchester County, Valley Proteins, is still operating on a permit that expired in 2006. Compliance history shows that this facility has been in Significant Noncompliance for at least the past three years consecutively for discharging excess nitrogen, phosphorus, and fecal coliform in the water, and failing to submit required monitoring reports. By requiring reports on enforcement actions MDE

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will be held accountable to address these significant noncompliance violations that are directly undermining the cleanup efforts under Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan.

ShoreRivers strongly believes that government transparency and accountability lead to greater enforcement of environmental laws. For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB204**.

Sincerely,



**Matt Pluta**

Choptank Riverkeeper, on behalf of:

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***ShoreRivers***

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

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