

Committee: House Environment & Transportation
Legislation: HB 204
Position: SUPPORT
Date: January 27, 2021

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Arundel Rivers Federation is a non-profit watershed organization dedicated to protecting, preserving, restoring and enhancing the waters of the South River, Rhode River, West River, and Herring Bay in Anne Arundel County. The Federation requests a favorable report for House Bill 204. This bill requires the Maryland Departments of Environment and Natural Resources to track and report publicly on various elements of their respective environmental enforcement efforts. This reporting will increase transparency in government, improve enforcement of environmental law, and involve citizens in the protection of our common natural resources.

Transparency

All of the information that HB204 would make available online to citizens is already public information obtainable through a request under the Public Information Act (PIA). The added value of HB204 is that it makes the information free, as opposed to subject to search and copy fees under the PIA, and reduces the expense to the Departments to pay personnel to respond to PIA requests. In addition, posting about enforcement actions online will enable an interested citizen to search for violations and investigations in their area of concern, rather than sending Department staff in search of records that might not actually exist. Simply put, this bill brings the State's environmental departments into the 21st century and enables the citizens to have current information about how the State is stewarding our common natural resources.

Enforcement and Engagement

House Bill 204 will also facilitate greater enforcement of environmental laws by empowering citizens and the non-profit community to assist with identifying enforcement actions, and following up on corrective measures. Arundel Rivers Federation is one of many environmental non-profits in the State that undertakes enforcement actions in protection of our natural resources. Each year, our organization alerts state and local authorities to dozens of environmental enforcement matters ranging from oil spills to illegal fishing practices to sediment and erosion control. When citizens and organizations interested in environmental protection can see with a click of a button whether a given event is receiving enforcement attention, and whether any mitigation measures are required, it enables the public to help the State to hold polluters accountable. This is an especially important point as both Departments struggle to function amid continued budgetary constraints and staffing shortages. House Bill 204 leverages the observation of the public into better environmental enforcement.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments.

Respectfully Submitted,



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