

February 16, 2022

FAVORABLE WITH BILL – SB 0367: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs – Patuxent River Commission - Membership

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 367 on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. As we here at Waterkeepers work to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State, we are also in support of ensuring that the Patuxent River Commission, Maryland's only River Commission, establish and adhere to criteria for appropriate appointments and to prevent conflicts of interest. The recent dismissal of the Patuxent Riverkeeper Fred Tutman, the commission's most outspoken advocate for the environment, is an egregious example of the consequences a lack of adherence to criteria can lead to. Fred Tutman had served on the commission since 1996 and became the founding Patuxent Riverkeeper in 2004, working on the very same river he was born and raised along. It is difficult to imagine anyone who has a greater vested interest in the health of the Patuxent River than Mr. Tutman, who has been an outspoken advocate for environmental justice and provide a voice for communities opposing development.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports Senate Bill 367 and its expressed goals. By preventing the unwarranted removal of future outspoken advocates for the environment, the commission will begin to once again show its priorities are with protecting communities and the environment, as opposed to developers. Therefore, we believe these requirements would properly be carried out under **Senate Bill 367's Program** in order to establish criteria to **ensure appropriate appointments and prevent conflict of interest, as well as requiring a permanent position on the Patuxent River Commission for the Patuxent Riverkeeper.**

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 367.

Alexander Villazon
Waterkeepers Chesapeake