

January 21, 2022

FAVORABLE WITH BILL – SB0035: Charles County - Program Open Space – General Assembly Approval

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 0035 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 the equitable distribution and availability of parks, playgrounds, and other green spaces for all citizens in Charles County, Maryland. Although the goal of Program Open Space has been to provide localities with financial and technical assistance for the development of recreational and open space areas, much of the funding provided by the program has been concentrated in only certain populations of Charles County. SB 35 aims to ensure equity in the distribution of these funds within Charles County through requiring the approval of legislation enacted by the General Assembly before any Charles County annual or revised program under Program Open Space takes effect. Furthermore, this bill would require similar approval before any project in Charles County may be approved for a grant. These requirements would act as a safeguard for communities who have been left with inequitable access to the parks and green spaces provided through Program Open Space funding.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports Senate Bill 0035 and its expressed requirements. The National Recreation and Park Association has defined “park access” as “The just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks, green spaces and recreation facilities, as well as programming that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone.” We strongly believe that equitable access to parks and green spaces in underserved communities helps foster a healthier, stronger, and more cohesive community. Therefore, we believe these requirements will help ensure a more equitable distribution of funds from Program Open Space in order to **greater benefit all citizens of Charles County** after having been excluded from the recreational benefits provided to their neighbors.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB0035.

Alexander Villazon
Waterkeepers Chesapeake