

H.B. 729 – NONTIDAL WETLANDS – PROTECTION OF VERNAL POOLS

(Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024)

COMMITTEE – Environment and Transportation

Testimony on H.B.729 – Vernal Pools Wetlands Protection Act of 2024

Position – SUPPORT

Hearing Date – February 21, 2024

Dear members of the Environment and Transportation committees,

I urge you to vote in favor on H.B. 729, the Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024, which would require the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to adopt regulations to protect and preserve vernal pools and to develop a plan for identifying vernal pools in the state. MDE would have to complete their plan for protecting vernal pools no later than October 1, 2025.

Vernal pools are unique, seasonal, micro -ecosystems that support an array of equally unique flora and fauna, some with eggs on the ground or seeds that have dried out and blown there in the wind just waiting for that rain to come and fill the shallow depression so the amazing transformation of these special plants and animals can begin. Vernal pools provide one-of-a-kind, critical breeding habitat and habitat for several species that remain in these shallow pools throughout their earliest stages of development or even their entire life, like Fairy Shrimp as an example.

Vernal pools provide additional eco-services such as they capture and retain rainfall helping to reduce erosion in other areas as they absorb the rainfall, recharging and replenishing the groundwater.

Vernal pools provide a calming connection with nature for free, all we need to do is identify and protect them. Many occur in other sensitive ecosystems such as shaded mature forests and shaded, forested stream corridors, these habitats are under threat for a variety of reasons like stream restorations and development which is why it is critical to establish protections that include a 100 foot buffer of protection around the pools.

Vernal pools are seasonal, ephemeral, and their shallow depressions are easy to miss in year round grading and development. Wetlands lost critical protections in the recent Supreme court case, Sacket vs the EPA, underscoring the need and urgency of this bill.

This bill will enable MDE to take the necessary steps to develop a plan to identify and protect Maryland's vernal pools and I urge you to please vote in favor of it.

Thank you for your immediate consideration.

Truly Yours, Sharon Boies, Columbia, MD

