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Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

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Chair, Public Safety,
Transportation, and Environment

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area

Chair, Joint Subcommittee on
Program Open Space/Agricultural
Land Preservation

Senator Christopher Van Hollen
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

July 13, 2023

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write in support of your legislation to designate a Chesapeake National Recreational Area as part of the National Park System. The new system would focus on and amplify the significant and rich natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources of the Chesapeake Bay. With the support of the world's premier park agency, the National Park Service, a Chesapeake National Recreation Area would formally connect parks throughout the Bay and tell a common narrative about the nation's largest estuary and one of the world's largest environmental restoration efforts.

What's more, recent state efforts in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania to significantly increase funding to and focus on rejuvenating parks systems around the watershed makes this the perfect moment for increased federal support and coordination. Here in Maryland, the 2022 passage of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act saw a \$200 million infusion of state funding to expand our State Parks system and prioritize the preservation of land and stories that are paramount to the experience and history of Black Marylanders, including the conservation of the historic Elktonia/Carr's Beach site in Annapolis. Other priorities of the Act included expanding the State Parks system to seek new parks and recreation opportunities in central Maryland, parks that are aligned with public transportation systems in order to increase public access, and parks that open waterfront opportunities for Marylanders to have greater access to their Chesapeake Bay. These policy values - and the national resurgence of public passion for parks and outdoor recreation - align perfectly with your effort to unify these treasured resources through a Chesapeake National Recreational Area.

The formal connection of these treasured areas, the expertise of the National Park Service, the additional federal resources for conservation and public access, and the power of National Park designation and branding would put the Chesapeake Bay on par with other nationally significant landscapes. Additionally, it would boost national and international support for the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

A Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area is an appropriate and feasible next step for the National Park Service role in the Chesapeake Bay, and would represent a major and permanent victory for partners working to restore and protect the Chesapeake Bay. Thank you for championing this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Elfreth".

Senator Sarah Elfreth