

Member Day Hearing for FY2023 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Appropriations – Written Testimony

Submitted on behalf of Representatives John Sarbanes (MD-03) and Bobby Scott (VA-03)

As the largest estuary in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay is both a national environmental treasure and a regional economic engine. Spanning Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay's expansive watershed impacts its residents' lives every day. The Bay supports tourism and seafood industries by providing unmatched recreational and educational experiences. Unfortunately, the Bay's health has been negatively impacted over time as the result of locally produced nutrient runoff, rising sea levels due to climate change, the loss of coastal and marine habitat and other factors. We are grateful to the Subcommittee for its consistent leadership in supporting vital restoration efforts for this ecosystem and urge its continued support of Chesapeake Bay programs in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 2023).

Our districts – Maryland's Third Congressional District and Virginia's Third Congressional District – border the Chesapeake Bay. Protecting and restoring the entire Watershed as well as the rivers and streams that feed it is important for our communities, our states, and the four other Watershed states and the District of Columbia that are heavily invested in implementing the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint – a collection of state plans to achieve pollution limits that is designed to restore this national treasure. The Bay restoration effort is at a critical moment in time and federal partnership to support this complex, cross-state effort is key to its success. While the Bay has shown significant improvements toward the shared clean water goal, more work and resources are needed to meet the goals outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement by 2025. To maintain the trust and collaboration of state partners and keep the

momentum of their efforts, we urge the subcommittee to include, at a minimum, the following funding levels for the programs listed below in its FY 2023 Appropriations bill.

NOAA Habitat Conservation and Restoration – 61.5 million: The Office of Habitat Conservation and Restoration within the National Marine Fisheries Service works to conserve habitat, restore fisheries and protected resources and increase the resilience of coastal ecosystems, communities and economies through habitat conservation. The Office leads several projects and offices in support of those goals, including the following:

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office – NOAA’s Chesapeake Bay Office supports the Bay habitat monitoring, resiliency, restoration and protection goals of the Chesapeake Bay Program. Scientific data from this office is critical for the management and restoration of oysters, blue crab, striped bass and other ecologically and commercially important species and for the planning, management and assessment of Bay Program priorities. In addition, the office provides several invaluable public education programs, including the Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program and the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System. The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office ensures that federal, state and local efforts to restore the Bay are coordinated and remain on track, and by making scientific data available to inform decisions, NOAA is helping the Chesapeake Bay realize the economic benefits of a healthy Bay. We introduced H.R. 3540, the Chesapeake Bay Science, Education and Ecosystem Enhancement (SEEE) Act, to reauthorize the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, which has not been reauthorized by Congress since 2006 although Congress has continued to appropriate funds annually for its operation. While we hope H.R. 3540, which was favorably reported out of the House

Natural Resources Committee by voice vote on January 20, 2022, will be expediently enacted, continued support for the Chesapeake Bay Office and broader support for the National Marine Fisheries Service is critical to enabling the Office's crucial work as the hub of all Bay-related programs and activities undertaken at NOAA. Robust funding will strengthen collaboration across those programs and ultimately allow the agency to more efficiently further its coastal resource stewardship mission.

NOAA Oyster Restoration – NOAA, through the NOAA Chesapeake Bay office, is one of the lead federal agencies involved in oyster restoration in the Chesapeake Bay. Native oyster populations in the Chesapeake Bay are at less than one percent of historic levels. With diminished oyster reefs, ecosystem functions, like fish habitats and nutrient removal, have also declined. In anticipation of the passage of the Chesapeake Bay Science, Education and Ecosystem Enhancement (SEEE) Act, to reauthorize the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office – which would also expand NOAA's aquaculture technical assistance programs to help with the restoration of living resources, including oysters, in the Bay – funding for the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office will enable its exemplary work with federal, state and local partners to implement large-scale restoration.

Given the great importance of the Chesapeake Bay Office and its programs to Watershed states like ours, we respectfully request the Subcommittee provide at least \$61.5 million for NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation and Restoration in the FY 2023 Appropriations bill.

NOAA Office of Education, B-WET Program – **\$12 million:** NOAA's Chesapeake Bay office implements the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET Chesapeake) program, which offers students and teachers in schools throughout the Watershed the opportunity to learn about the scientific value and wonder of the Bay ecosystem firsthand.

The need for this program has only increased in recent years as outdoor and in-person learning opportunities for students have declined due to COVID-19-related precautions. B-WET funds and supports professional development for teachers to offer Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) that increase students' knowledge and skills to protect watersheds and related ocean, coastal, and related ecosystems. A 2017 NOAA report demonstrates that B-WET successfully increases teachers' watershed literacy and confidence in implementing MWEEs while improving students' MWEE outcomes, watershed literacy and stewardship behaviors. We urge the Subcommittee to continue its robust support for the B-WET Program through NOAA's Office of Education so that our educators can continue teaching young people how their everyday actions affect the Bay.

National Sea Grant College Program – \$160 million: Sea Grant programs carry out vital research in the Chesapeake Bay. Activities include university research on oyster diseases, oyster restoration and oyster-related human health risks; research on the biology, prevention and forecasting of harmful algal blooms; research, education and extension services and activities focused on coastal resilience; and university research on sustainable aquaculture. Sea Grant programs also fund the Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, which places fellows with a demonstrated interest in marine policy in Congressional offices. Together, these programs provide critical services to a wide range of constituents across the country and specifically in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, contributing to making coastal communities more resilient while helping aquaculture industries to prosper. We therefore respectfully request the Subcommittee include \$160 million for the Sea Grant Program in its FY 2023 Appropriations bill.

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries – \$80.5 million: Marine sanctuaries conserve some of the nation's most critical natural, historic and cultural resources. For example, the

Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary, which joined the Marine Sanctuary program in 2019, provides international recognition to the historic and unique resources of Mallows Bay – most notably its more than 100 historic World War I shipwrecks. Robust funding for the Marine Sanctuaries operations and construction will provide much-needed support for infrastructure – including visitor centers, vessels and facilities – at marine sanctuaries like Mallows Bay. We urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$8.5 million for this important office.

We are proud to represent portions of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in Congress and look forward to building on the significant improvements the programs outlined above have made to the health of the Chesapeake Bay to date. Chesapeake Bay states have invested significant resources into restoring this national treasure. Recent investments provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act represent a crucial infusion of funding to advance the implementation of the Blueprint at a critical time, however even accounting for these additional funds, state investments continue to dwarf federal investments as the Office of Management and Budget reported to Congress in the Chesapeake Cross-cut Budget in December 2021. To maintain the spirit of trust and collaboration that is the hallmark of this successful federal-state partnership, it is essential to maintain consistent federal support for this effort. There are many indications that efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay are succeeding, but in order to reach the goals of the 2025 Chesapeake Bay Agreement, Congress must uphold its robust commitment to the restoration of the Bay ecosystem and the many communities and industries that it supports. We thank you for supporting this essential partnership with Bay states in an extraordinary effort to restore our national treasure for current and future generations.