

**Statement of Congressman John P. Sarbanes (as prepared for delivery)**  
**Legislative Hearing on National Park bills**  
**House Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**

*May 22, 2019*

Thank you very much Chair Haaland, Ranking Member Young, other members of the committee for having this hearing today and inviting us to testify.

I'm here in support of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Reauthorization Act of 2019, which would reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Program for six years.

Administered by the National Park Service, the Gateways program provides financial and technical assistance to local communities to increase interpretation, recreation, education, and access to the Chesapeake Bay – a national treasure and economic driver.

Providing the millions of people who live near the Chesapeake Bay the opportunity to experience it is critical, and the Gateways programs helps to achieve that mission.

To date the Gateways program has provided over \$20 million in technical and financial assistance for more than 300 projects in communities throughout the watershed, stimulating the region's outdoor recreation economy.

It's also a very important part of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, helping the National Park Service fulfill its responsibility to foster land conservation, public access, stewardship, diversity and education, as outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Originally authorized in 1998, the program has recently relied on one to two-year reauthorizations because we haven't been able to give the program the certainty that it deserves, and that stakeholders are looking for. The current authorization is set to expire in October of this year, making it critical that Congress move quickly to reauthorize this program so that the National Park Service can continue to fulfill its responsibilities to the Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay is home to over 18 million people – 10 million of which live along or near the shoreline – and thousands of species of plants and animals. As the largest estuary in the nation, the Chesapeake Bay watershed extends from Virginia through my home state of Maryland, out to West Virginia and up to New York. The Gateways Program has helped to connect diverse groups of people from near and far to this amazing natural resource with a relatively small investment, which is why it has garnered so much support.

In fact, I have a letter signed by leaders representing organizations across the watershed that urges swift consideration of this bill. I also have a letter from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources supporting this legislation.

I ask unanimous consent that these letters be entered into the record.

To close, I urge my colleagues to allow the Park Service to uphold its commitment to the region and to support this bill.

Thank you, and I yield the balance of my time.