



Senate Bill 73
Renaming the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program to be the Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program
Written Testimony

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Submitted to: Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust supports Senate Bill 73 to rename the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program to the Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program. This important piece of legislation will honor the legacy of State Senate President Mike Miller, who dedicated much of his life to the preservation of the Chesapeake Bay and the advancement of education and environmental stewardship in Maryland.

Senator Miller's deep commitment to the Chesapeake Bay and his leadership in the Maryland General Assembly were critical in the establishment of the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program. Chapters 257 and 276 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2010, which were sponsored by Senator Mike Miller, created the program and directed the Chesapeake Bay Trust to administer it. By renaming the program in his honor, we continue to recognize his positive influence on Maryland's environmental efforts, as well as his passion for nurturing the next generation of environmental leaders.

For the past 15 years, the Chesapeake Conservation Corps has played a critical role in increasing access to green careers across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, providing young adults with hands-on experience in the restoration and protection of our environment. The program has been pivotal in developing the next generation of environmental stewards, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and leadership necessary to address the challenges facing our natural resources.

Since its inception, the program has received nearly 1,600 applications from young adults eager to make a difference. It has successfully placed more than 500 individuals with nonprofit and government agencies across Maryland, where they gain valuable experience in fields such as environmental restoration, climate change mitigation, sustainable agriculture, energy conservation, forestry, community engagement, and more. Currently, the 15th class of the Corps includes over 50 members, underscoring the continued demand for this program.

Additionally, the Chesapeake Conservation Corps has an engaged and successful alumni network of over 400 individuals. Nearly 70% of these alumni have secured full-time "green" jobs immediately following their service year, with 29% continuing with their Host Organizations. These statistics demonstrate the program's effectiveness in providing young people with the professional experience necessary to launch successful careers in environmental fields, supporting Maryland's ongoing environmental goals.

Senate Bill 528, the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, further expanded the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Program by increasing the focus on climate change-related projects. This critical legislation not only requires Corps projects to result in long-term preservation, protection, and conservation of the environment—including in areas such as environmental restoration, agriculture and forestry, infrastructure, and education—but also directs these projects to take place within communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts. The law places specific emphasis on climate mitigation and clean energy projects, prioritizing initiatives that lead to long-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and improvements to public health and the environment.

The proposed renaming of the Corps to the Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Program will further cement the importance of this program and its alignment with Senator Miller’s legacy of environmental leadership. It will also bring greater visibility to the program’s work, helping to inspire future generations of young people to pursue careers in conservation, climate change action, and sustainability.

Favorable support by the committee to pass Senate Bill 0073 will ensure that we continue to honor Senator Mike Miller’s contributions to Maryland’s environmental and educational efforts while ensuring the continued success of the Corps for years to come.

Background on the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps

The Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps places young people ages 18-25 in year-long, stipend-supported terms of service at host not-for-profit entities across the region. Corps members:

- 1) work on a project to advance their Host Organizations’ missions in the realms of watershed restoration, energy conservation, climate, climate justice, agriculture, and K-12 environmental education (expanding their Host Organizations’ capacity),
- 2) receive life and career skills training, and
- 3) learn to lead their own independent projects (including developing budgets and managing grants).

Host Organizations include environmental and non-environmental entities (e.g., faith institutions, local governments, school systems, civic associations with social missions, etc.) alike.

In its first 15 years, 428 alums have completed the Conservation Corps program. Thirty percent of Corps members are generally immediately hired by their Host Organizations or another host in the program, many into new jobs that were made possible by the expanded capacity at the Host Organization driven by the Corps member’s service. Hundreds of organizations have served as Host Organizations, many of which expanded in size during this period and have filled their staffs with Corps alums.

Over the 15 years of the Corps, members have planted 10,000 trees and 30,000 native plants and engaged 40,000 students and volunteers as part of their 400+ individual capstone projects.



From 2010 to 2023, the Corps was supported only by the Chesapeake Bay Trust’s unrestricted revenue (mostly Chesapeake vehicle license plate and tax checkoff funds), a mandated contribution from Maryland DNR, and voluntary contributions from the National Park Service, BGE, and others. For FY24, your committee approved an additional \$1.5 million mandated in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, which also required an increase in the members’ stipends, allowing an expansion of the Corps from 33 members to 50+ members.

Demand for the Chesapeake Conservation Corps has to date exceeded available resources by about double. Last year (2024-2025 Corps year), 145 prospective Corps members applied to serve, and 112 not-for-profit entities applied as hosts. For the 2025-2026 Corps class supported by this appropriation, 124 entities applied to serve as hosts with the member deadline in March.

More recently, the Trust has been working with the Governor's new Department of Service and Civic Innovation, which is managing the new Service Year and Maryland Corps programs. As noted above, the Trust has been supporting the administration of the climate placements for the Service Year option. Our goal is to continue to coordinate to offer young people seamless Climate Corps opportunities.



More information about the Corps can be found at www.cbtrust.org/corps.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a nonprofit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work with groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based and reach large institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting on average 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$200 million through more than 12,500 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985 (www.cbtrust.org/impact). We make about 450 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation to support its operations, instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland's online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for more than two decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenets in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues, and that theme characterizes all the Trust's programs, including the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources.