

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 22, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for making climate solutions on productive and sustainable working lands a priority. We urge you to direct previously allocated, non-expended Fiscal Year 2021 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funds to establish the Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative. The timely reallocation of financial and technical assistance to producers in the most effective basins in the Chesapeake Bay watershed will reduce nutrient pollution from their farms and help our states meet their water quality goals. Enhancing climate resilience in the region will fulfill the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) commitments in Executive Order 13508, Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration, and well as Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Change Crisis at Home and Abroad.

We respectfully ask you to identify any available funds for the establishment of a climate-smart agriculture conservation initiative. Chesapeake Bay restoration partner organizations estimate nearly \$750 million is needed over ten years for natural resources conservation programs in the watershed.

Launching an initiative using Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is critical to ensuring states attain the Bay TMDL and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, of which USDA is a trusted federal agency partner.

The region's farmers are committed to protecting the Chesapeake Bay while contributing to the nation's food supply and economy, despite growing pressures including climate change impacts. However, additional resources are needed to support this work. Recent data revisions mostly affecting agriculture are increasing the estimated amount of nitrogen reaching the Bay by 6.2 million pounds per year and phosphorus by 600,000 pounds—more than one-fifth of the estimated reductions the watershed has achieved since the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint goals were set in 2010. We must deliver the federal resources needed to significantly increase the pace of voluntary conservation and help close this gap by 2025.

Our states have already identified the areas where projects that cost-effectively reduce nutrients and sediment pollution are also highly effective at mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and helping farmers adapt to climate change. For example, riparian forest buffers serve as natural

filters that increase groundwater recharge, helping to ensure local streams do not go dry during prolonged periods of dry weather, and store rainfall as well as carbon in soils.

The need for additional investment in conservation assistance for farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is more urgent than ever. Please ensure no stone is unturned to start a climate-smart initiative in the region throughout the funds assessment process. We look forward to working with you to support eligible producers and partners in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Abigail Davis Spanberger
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



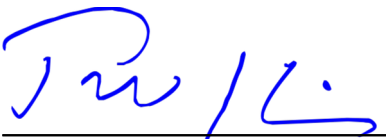
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United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress




Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



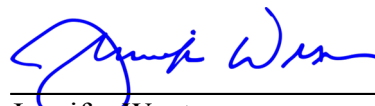
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Elaine Luria
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