

SUPPORT HB521

Topic: Marine Resources Commission; powers and duties; wetlands.

Bill Patron: Delegate Phil Hernandez

OVERVIEW:

HB521 strengthens Virginia's wetlands protections by requiring the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) to ensure no net loss of existing wetland acreage when reviewing permits. As federal protections for many wetlands were removed following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Sackett v. EPA*, Virginia's state wetlands laws are now more important than ever.

The bill also requires appropriate mitigation when wetland impacts occur and establishes a stakeholder group to address mitigation requirements for tidal non-vegetated wetlands, an often overlooked but critical component of coastal resilience. The stakeholder group's findings will help guide future policy and improve long-term protections for these vulnerable areas.

REASONS TO SUPPORT:

- HB521 responds to weakened federal wetlands protections by reinforcing Virginia's responsibility to protect wetlands that support local economies, communities, and the Chesapeake Bay.
- The bill ensures no net loss of wetlands by requiring mitigation for permitted impacts, helping maintain the natural systems that reduce flooding, control erosion, and improve water quality.
- By addressing tidal non-vegetated wetlands, HB521 fills a critical gap in current policy and strengthens protections for areas essential to coastal resilience.
- Wetlands protected under HB521 help shield low-lying and disadvantaged communities from flooding and storm damage, impacts that are exacerbated when wetlands are filled or degraded.
- The stakeholder group established by the bill will provide science-based recommendations to improve mitigation practices and guide future wetlands policy in Virginia.



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