



#### Founders

Vernice Miller-Travis  
Peggy M. Shepard  
Chuck Sutton

#### Board of Directors

##### Co-Chairs

Gregory Anderson  
Patricia A. Terry

##### Secretary

Roberto Lebron, Esq.

##### Treasurer

Patricia A. Terry

#### Members

Charles H. Allison, Jr.  
R. Darryl Banks  
Joseph Bosch  
Dennis Derryck, Ph.D.  
Eric A. Goldstein, Esq.  
Al Huang  
Jeff Jones  
Marianne Engelman Lado  
Sharon Lopez  
Vernice Miller-Travis  
Phillip Morrow  
Hope K. Plasha  
Regina Smith  
Dart Westphal

#### Executive Director

Peggy M. Shepard

Mr. Nicholas DiPasquale

Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program Management Board

410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109

Annapolis, MD 21403

agreement@chesapeakebay.net

March 17, 2014

Dear Mr. DiPasquale and Management Board Members:

Thank you for your commitment to restore the Chesapeake Bay and protect the health of its communities and the opportunity to comment on the **final draft of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement**.

**WE ACT for Environmental Justice (aka WE ACT)** is a 25-year-old community-based environmental justice organization, headquartered in Harlem, New York. Our mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. WE ACT is known for educating and elevating community voices on environmental issues, using community based participatory research principles, to build community capacity. We have worked with key partners and diverse stakeholder groups for years.

While we engage at advocacy at the local, state level in New York, **in July of 2012 we opened up our WE ACT DC legislative office to build stronger ties and sustained engagement in Federal Administrative and Congressional matters**. While our primary focus is providing an environmental justice perspective on federal policy, proposed guidelines and legislation that could disproportionately impact communities of color, and/or low-income, it is crucial that we help amplify the environmental concerns of the Washington-DC Metro region.

Shortly after we opened the office, **WE ACT spearheaded the discussions and the formation of an ad-hoc group of environmental and environmental justice leaders across the region** that were interested in learning, engaging and supporting actions to improve the health of communities of color, and/or low income communities that often are left out of the discussion. **For nearly 2 years, the DMV EJ Coalition has expanded to include residents, NGO and GO leaders, key academic partners – specifically the University of Maryland, and many concerned citizens .**



With that in mind, we felt it was critical that we provide some considerations, from an EJ perspective, that you might want to keep in mind as you finalize this document.

- **Impact of the urban environment:** The Chesapeake Bay Agreement does an honorable job of laying the ground work for restoring the natural environment in the region. However, it is silent on the conditions of the built and urban environment. Urban blight is a physical and environmental condition often linked to environmental justice issues in urban communities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, Prince George's County, and Washington D.C. It should not be left out of any regional environmental policy. More specifically, the Chesapeake Bay Agreement does not include actions to address illegal dumping, abandoned housing, food deserts, or toxic pollution. The absence of such language is poised to inadvertently help sustain such issues.
- **Community Engagement:** Expand the Chesapeake Bay Programs' message beyond the conservation and protection of the natural environment to include the funding of more diverse program areas. Work with EPA Region 3 to increase appropriations to agencies, or programs that deal with environmental justice, toxics, and urban blight. In FY 2013-2014 there was no funding for these issues, including toxics; even though, a significant amount of comments on toxic chemicals were received. Increase outreach and funding for existing urban environmental programs, or to establish new programs that address urban food deserts, abandoned housing, illegal dumping, and community engagement with civic and community leaders. Fund and support these programs through grants with special attention given to minority owned businesses, non-profits, local jurisdictions serving urban communities as well as non-minority groups working on the above issues.
- **Decision-making:** Expand efforts to recruit qualified minority owned non-profits and businesses, and local civic leaders for decision making agencies and boards. These partners should have a stake in environmental justice, food access, and eliminating toxic pollution in urban communities. Have a minimum 10% representation for these communities in agency staff and 20% representation on related boards. To be completed by 2020.
- **Environmental education:** In Maryland and other jurisdictions, environmental education is now, or will be mandated through environmental literacy requirements for high school graduation. This is a good thing. The focus to increase the number of students participating in meaningful outdoor watershed experiences is also a welcomed. However, the Chesapeake Bay Agreement must go further on this issue. The Chesapeake Bay Agreement must go further to encourage environmental education that prepares students for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math careers. There should be policy and funding to bring together grade school and College and Universities with the intent to provide increased access to environmental programs and scholarships. This policy and funding behavior is especially prudent for communities where employment, career development, and job training is most elusive and where women and other minorities are in high demand for STEM careers.

- **Funding:** By the year 2017, 50% of colleges and universities providing environmental programs within the Chesapeake Bay will have funding to engage high school students. Such programs should be designed to increase access to Science, Technology, Engineering, Math careers for all. However, they must also have specific and adequate funding to increase access for women and other minorities. Entrance and success in these programs will provide an additional metric for measuring the efficacy of environmental literacy in grade schools.

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to work for the Maryland Department of the Environment and support to the Director of Environmental Justice to help coordinate statewide public listening sessions to hear the concerns of communities across the state of Maryland. One thing that I will always remember, and what guides my work to this day, is that you must include the people that are being most impacted into the process to help craft the best solutions. **Therefore, it is my hope that you will strongly consider our comments and add specific language that acknowledges and addresses the environmental justice concerns in the Bay area: urban infrastructure, lack of diversity of decision making bodies, targeted outreach and education and funding.**

We also hope that you and your team will engage members of our DMV Metro EJ Coalition, members of the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities, in future discussions to help shape the implementation of the proposed elements of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement in a way that will address the concerns of low income, communities of color that are impacted by the Bay. Environmental Justice is a conversation and consideration that needs to be made at the forefront of any efforts – not an afterthought.

Again, thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to working with you.

Yours in health and environment,

Dr. Jalonnie L. White-Newsome  
WE ACT for Environmental Justice  
50 F St, NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20001  
[jalonne@weact.org](mailto:jalonne@weact.org)