

Backgrounder Resolution to Enhance Local Government Engagement

BACKGROUND: Executive Council Resolution to Enhance Local Government Engagement – 2016

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement acknowledges that local governments are key partners in achieving our shared vision of an environmentally and economically sustainable Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Chesapeake Bay Program Partners recognize that local governments face many challenges including constituents' lack of awareness about the need to make public investments in protecting and restoring the watershed and lack of sufficient public resources to take the necessary actions to realize this vision. The Executive Council's Resolution to Enhance Local Government Engagement moves that recognition to specific and necessary action.

Major pollution reductions are possible when federal, state, and local governments work together, as the Chesapeake Bay watershed partners have shown through Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades. However, much more needs to be done. This Resolution not only celebrates those successes but takes three key steps to help local governments address pollution from stormwater runoff. First, it commits to increasing citizen understanding and support for clean water through personal messages from elected officials that show not only the benefits of clean water to the environment, but also to the economy. Second, it commits to using existing funds more efficiently for implementation of practices. Finally, it commits to advocating for new funds to be allocated to this important effort.

Background and Issues

Elected officials at the local, state and federal level can help raise public awareness and support for clean water initiatives by speaking out for clean water. Each of the Chesapeake Bay watershed states and the District of Columbia should produce and distribute Public Service Announcements (PSAs) specific to their jurisdictions. PSAs should include state legislative and local government leaders. Further, consistent with the Executive Council's Purpose, which is to exert leadership to marshal public support for the Bay effort, all members should assist in the use and wide distribution of PSAs, and the use of social media and other public venues to speak out for clean water.

Steps need to be taken at all levels of government to increase funds directed to local implementation of practices that improve local water quality and contribute to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. To date, more than sixty communities in the watershed have adopted some form of dedicated local financing to address stormwater program costs. Federal funding allocated to the seven jurisdictional signatories to the Watershed Agreement totaled more than \$28 million in each of the last two years (2014 and 2015). These grants must be matched dollar for dollar with non-federal funds, resulting in more than \$56 million appropriated annually.

The Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) will conduct an evaluation of these funds as well as other existing federal and state funding programs in order to identify opportunities to use funds more efficiently or to direct more funding to implementation. More robust technical assistance programs will also be needed to increase local implementation. Under the supervision of the PSC, and in partnership with the Local Government Advisory Committee, the Chesapeake Bay Program will prepare brief summaries of existing funding and technical assistance programs and evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in facilitating local implementation. The PSC, in partnership with the Local Government Advisory Committee, will develop recommendations to establish new, re-tool existing, or expand state and/or federal programs in support of local implementation.

Finally, the Executive Council's support for increased allocations of federal funding for local infrastructure projects is needed. This will be accomplished through briefing materials and/or face-to-face meetings between Executive Council members and their congressional delegations. For instance, the Chesapeake Bay Commission will engage members of Congress on this topic during a quarterly meeting. The Principals' Staff Committee, with guidance from the Local Government Advisory Committee, will develop common themes for each Executive Council member to use in discussions with Congress; therefore, allowing the region to "speak with one voice." Briefing materials should also include findings from the above referenced evaluation of existing federal infrastructure programs.