



November XX, 2022

Shalanda D. Young, Director
Office of Management and Budget
The White House
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Young:

As members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition we are concerned about federal support for programs that are essential to maintaining and restoring clean water in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the historic Clean Water Act, it is critical to continue the robust federal funding that has been the bedrock for restoration of the iconic Chesapeake Bay, and to fully and strategically implement new legislation that is already benefiting the Chesapeake region.

The 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to over 18 million people. More than 11 million people in this region get their drinking water directly from the rivers and streams that flow through our cities, towns and farms. Maintaining healthy local water and restoring the Chesapeake Bay is critical for our regional economy and for human health.

In May 2009, the Obama Administration recognized the iconic status of the Chesapeake with the issuance of Executive Order 13508, "Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration." This executive order, which designated the Chesapeake Bay "a national treasure", was followed by the establishment of a historic Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which covers parts of six states and the District of Columbia. This TMDL focuses on restoration goals for a cleaner Chesapeake by 2025, which is fast approaching.

In 2020, Congress passed provisions through the America's Conservation Enhancement Act (P.L. 116-188) to ensure progress in restoring the Chesapeake itself and protecting critical waterways and habitat throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed – this legislation created the new Chesapeake WILD program under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and reauthorized two key Chesapeake programs under other agencies – the U.S Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program and the National Park Service's Chesapeake Gateways and Watertrails Program.

In 2021 and 2022 the Biden Administration initiated and successfully fought for two new pieces of legislation that are critical to clean water in the Chesapeake region – the

bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). We strongly supported these efforts and want to ensure that the implementation of these new laws meets our expectations in the Chesapeake region.

Our immediate request is for the President to propose robust funding for four key programs in the President's FY24 Budget Request to Congress:

We urge the President to fully fund these three programs in the FY24 Budget Request:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) - Chesapeake Bay Program - \$91.5 million

The authorized level of funding for the Chesapeake Bay Program is \$91.5 million in FY24 – a \$500,000 increase over the FY22 authorized level. We are requesting full funding for this program which is at the center of Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration.

The Chesapeake Bay Program is the nation's premier estuarine restoration program, and is the model for the National Estuary Program. EPA is the lead Federal agency for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and coordinates and enforces this comprehensive effort.

There has been a lot of progress in restoring the Bay and bringing cleaner water to all of its tributaries throughout the six-state region. However, new stressors such as climate change, dynamic equilibrium at Conowingo Dam increasing nutrient and sediment loads to the Bay, rapid development and the COVID-19 pandemic, restoration progress has slowed as formal cleanup deadlines are coming due in 2025. As the Chesapeake Bay Program grapples with "recalibrating" the 2025 restoration goals, it is imperative to continue to fund this critical program at authorized levels.

We also strongly support Congress' charge and EPA's allocation decisions to ensure that a significant portion of FY22 and FY23 funding goes to on-the-ground restoration through existing grant programs and we urge that allocation to continue. As EPA did in FY22 and Congress has directed up to this point for FY23, we urge you to allocate \$40 million of the additional \$47.6 million of the funds from the bipartisan IIJA for FY24 to three key existing grant programs, which would total \$25.625 million for Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants; \$20.625 million for Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction grants; and \$22.958 million for State-based Implementation in the Most Effective Basins. This combines the annual allocation from regular FY24 appropriations with the FY24 supplemental funds from the IIJA. These grant programs provide on-the-ground restoration and are targeted to help implement each state's Watershed Implementation Plan.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (Chesapeake WILD) - \$15.0 million

We urge inclusion of the authorized amount of \$15 million in the President's FY24 Budget Request for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Chesapeake WILD Program. The Service is building the premier fish and wildlife habitat program in the Mid-Atlantic region and full funding is necessary to achieve the living resource and habitat goals set by state, federal and local partners in the Chesapeake Bay Program. The Program will also advance climate-change adaptation and has targeted building community partnerships, especially with under-resourced communities.

Although Chesapeake WILD was created in October 2020, the timing was too late for the FY21 appropriations process in Congress. That missed Fiscal Year of funding, combined with the very late passage of the FY22 appropriations by Congress, has led to the first grants under this program being just recently awarded in August 2022.

Chesapeake WILD is intended to assist local partners with on-the-ground work to enhance progress toward Bay watershed-wide goals on some of the following: riparian forest buffer restoration; improving stream health; tidal and non-tidal wetland restoration; improving fish habitat; expanding populations of black ducks; restoring and protecting eastern brook trout and their habitat; and removing barriers to fish migration in freshwater systems. Many of these efforts will also have water quality benefits that will help to accelerate progress toward meeting clean water restoration goals.

National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network Program - \$6.0 million

Through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network (Chesapeake Gateways program), the National Park Service provides unique and vital assistance to state, local and nongovernmental partners throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed to increase public access to the Bay, to support educational programming and outdoor recreation, and to foster conservation stewardship among residents and visitors. First authorized by Congress in 1998, the Chesapeake Gateways program has contributed over \$30 million in technical and financial assistance across the Bay watershed. Through these efforts, the Chesapeake Gateways program supports local economies through outdoor recreation and heritage tourism. Recent studies show that tourists spend \$25.7 billion annually in the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network alone.

The Chesapeake Gateways program is also aligned with goals of the Administration's recently signed *United States Government Interagency Memorandum of Understanding on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities*. The National Park Service recently updated its grant program to address inequities in public access in the Chesapeake Bay region and to support community resilience through sustainable tourism.

Despite the valued mission serving communities and partners across the 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed, funding for the Chesapeake Gateways program has not kept up with growing demand over the program's 25-year history. Twenty years ago, in 2004 the Gateways Program funding was \$2.469 million – it has increased very slowly to only \$3.027 million in FY22. We respectfully request that this program be

increased to \$6.0 million in the President's FY24 Budget to help meet the tremendous demand for access to our natural, historic and cultural resources in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

We urge the President to continue and to expand funding for the newly created Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership Initiative. This Initiative by the U.S Department of Agriculture will help farmers with their efforts to remain economically viable while also reducing polluted farm runoff.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Continue and Expand the Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership Initiative - \$73 million

We strongly support the Administration's creation of the Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership Initiative within the USDA. This \$22.5 million Initiative was created earlier this year using unspent FY21 funds from three agriculture conservation programs – Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

We urge the President to make this Initiative permanent and to considerably increase funding. All three funding sources of this Initiative, EQIP, CSP and ACEP, are receiving large supplemental funds from the IRA, and we request that part of those new funds be used for this modest but critical Initiative. EQIP (\$8.45 billion), CSP (\$3.25 billion), ACEP (\$1.4 billion) and at least \$1 billion for conservation technical assistance combined totals over \$14 billion in supplemental funds this decade and a small portion of that should be directed to this new Initiative.

EPA and the states have determined that 50 million pounds of nitrogen pollution needs to be eliminated in order to meet the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load – and 85% of those reductions must come from agriculture and forestry. It is imperative that the Administration continue and expand this timely Initiative. It is estimated that the agriculture sector needs \$737 million over ten years to meet these reductions. We urge the President to provide a one year down payment on this need and to include \$73 million in the FY24 Budget for USDA's Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership Initiative.

Thank you for your consideration of these important requests that are essential for clean water throughout the Chesapeake Bay region. Please contact Peter J. Marx at 410-905-2515 or peter@chooscleanwater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,