

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 3939

To reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 26, 2026

Mr. WARNER (for himself, Mr. KAINE, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Ms. ALSOBROOKS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

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## A BILL

To reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

### 3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Chesapeake Watershed  
5 Advancement for Training, Education, Restoration, and  
6 Science Act” or the “Chesapeake WATERS Act”.

### 7 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

8 It is the sense of Congress that the Chesapeake Bay  
9 Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Adminis-

1 tration should be the primary representative of the Na-  
 2 tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the  
 3 Chesapeake Bay watershed.

4 **SEC. 3. REAUTHORIZATION OF THE NATIONAL OCEANIC**  
 5 **AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**  
 6 **CHESAPEAKE BAY OFFICE.**

7 Section 307 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
 8 Administration Authorization Act of 1992 (15 U.S.C.  
 9 1511d) is amended—

10 (1) in subsection (a)—

11 (A) in paragraph (1), by striking “(in this  
 12 section referred to as the ‘Office’)”;

13 (B) by amending paragraph (2) to read as  
 14 follows:

15 “(2) The Office shall be headed by a Director, who—

16 “(A) shall have knowledge and experience in re-  
 17 search or resource management efforts in the Ches-  
 18 peake Bay; and

19 “(B) shall be responsible for the administration  
 20 and operation of the Office and the implementation  
 21 of this section.”; and

22 (C) by striking paragraph (3);

23 (2) in subsection (b)—

(A) in paragraph (2), by striking “Secretary of Commerce” and inserting “Administrator”;

(B) in paragraph (3)—

(i) by inserting “with and represent” after “coordinate”;

(ii) by striking “, the Chesapeake Bay Regional Sea Grant Programs, and the Chesapeake Bay units of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System,” and inserting “for the Chesapeake Bay Program and that relate to the Chesapeake Bay watershed in furtherance of such Administration’s coastal resource stewardship mission,”;

(iii) in subparagraph (A)—

(I) in clauses (vi) and (vii), by striking “and” at the end; and

(II) by adding at the end the following:

“(viii) coastal hazards and climate change; and

“(ix) education; and”; and

(iv) in subparagraph (B)—

1 (I) in clause (iii), by striking  
2 “and” at the end;

3 (II) in clause (iv), by inserting  
4 “and” after the semicolon; and

5 (III) by adding at the end the  
6 following:

7 “(v) integrated ecosystem assess-  
8 ments;”;

9 (C) in paragraph (4)—

10 (i) by striking “Environmental Pro-  
11 tection Agency” and inserting “Chesapeake  
12 Executive Council”; and

13 (ii) by inserting “as appropriate to  
14 further the purposes of this section” after  
15 “agencies”;

16 (D) by striking paragraphs (5) and (7);

17 (E) by redesignating paragraph (6) as  
18 paragraph (5); and

19 (F) by adding at the end the following:

20 “(6) perform any functions necessary to sup-  
21 port the programs and activities referred to in para-  
22 graph (3).”;

23 (3) by striking subsections (c), (d), and (e); and

24 (4) by adding at the end the following:

25 “(c) PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES.—

1           “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
2 through the Director, shall implement the programs  
3 and activities authorized by this section to support  
4 the activity of the Chesapeake Executive Council and  
5 to further the purposes of this section.

6           “(2) ENSURING SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL  
7 MERIT.—The Director shall—

8               “(A) establish and use an effective and  
9 transparent mechanism to ensure that projects  
10 carried out under this section have undergone  
11 appropriate peer review; and

12               “(B) provide other appropriate means to  
13 determine that such projects have acceptable  
14 scientific and technical merit for the purpose of  
15 achieving maximum use of available funds and  
16 resources to benefit the Chesapeake Bay area.

17           “(3) CONSULTATION WITH CHESAPEAKE EXEC-  
18 UTIVE COUNCIL.—The Director shall, in the imple-  
19 mentation of the programs and activities authorized  
20 by this section, consult with the Chesapeake Execu-  
21 tive Council to ensure that the activities of the Of-  
22 fice are consistent with the purposes and priorities  
23 of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement and plans devel-  
24 oped pursuant to that agreement.

25           “(4) INTEGRATED COASTAL OBSERVATIONS.—

1           “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
2           through the Director, may collaborate with sci-  
3           entific and academic institutions, State and  
4           Federal agencies, nongovernmental organiza-  
5           tions, and other constituents in the Chesapeake  
6           Bay watershed to support a regional coastal ob-  
7           serving system for the Chesapeake Bay con-  
8           sistent with the purposes of the Integrated  
9           Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of  
10          2009 (33 U.S.C. 3601 et seq.).

11          “(B) SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS.—To sup-  
12          port the system referred to in subparagraph (A)  
13          and provide a complete set of environmental in-  
14          formation for the Chesapeake Bay, the Director  
15          shall—

16               “(i) coordinate monitoring with Fed-  
17               eral and State agencies in the tidal por-  
18               tions of the Chesapeake Bay to understand  
19               impacts of water quality on living marine  
20               resources;

21               “(ii) identify new data collection needs  
22               and deploy new technologies, as appro-  
23               priate;

24               “(iii) collect and analyze the scientific  
25               information necessary for the management

of living marine resources and the marine  
habitat associated with those resources;  
and

“(iv) organize the information described in clause (iii) into products that are useful to policymakers, resource managers, scientists, and the public.

“(C) CHESAPEAKE BAY INTERPRETIVE BUOY SYSTEM.—To further the development and implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and associated monitoring assets to improve weather and ecological forecasts and monitor habitat conditions for living marine resources, the Director may—

“(i) support the establishment and implementation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail;

“(ii) delineate key waypoints along the trail and provide appropriate real-time data and information for trail users;

“(iii) interpret data and information for use by educators and students to inspire stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay;  
and

1 “(iv) incorporate the observational  
 2 data from the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive  
 3 Buoy System into the Integrated Ocean  
 4 Observing System network of regional  
 5 coastal observing systems.

6 “(5) CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED EDU-  
 7 CATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM.—

8 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
 9 through the Director, may establish a Ches-  
 10 apeake Bay watershed education and training  
 11 program. The program shall—

12 “(i) continue and expand the Chesa-  
 13 peake Bay watershed education programs  
 14 offered by the Office immediately before  
 15 the enactment of the Chesapeake Water-  
 16 shed Advancement for Training, Edu-  
 17 cation, Restoration, and Science Act;

18 “(ii) improve the understanding of el-  
 19 ementary and secondary school students  
 20 and teachers of the living resources of the  
 21 Chesapeake Bay ecosystem;

22 “(iii) provide education and career  
 23 pathway internships; and

24 “(iv) meet the educational goals of the  
 25 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.



1           “(B) GRANT PROGRAM.—The Director  
2           may award grants for the purposes of this para-  
3           graph. Grants awarded under this subpara-  
4           graph may be used to support education and  
5           training projects that enhance understanding  
6           and assessment of a specific environmental  
7           problem in the Chesapeake Bay watershed or a  
8           goal of the Chesapeake Bay Program, or pro-  
9           tect or restore living resources of the Chesa-  
10          peake Bay watershed, including projects that—

11               “(i) provide classroom education, in-  
12               cluding the development and use of dis-  
13               tance learning and other innovative tech-  
14               nologies, related to the Chesapeake Bay  
15               watershed;

16               “(ii) provide meaningful watershed  
17               educational experiences in the Chesapeake  
18               Bay watershed;

19               “(iii) provide professional development  
20               for teachers related to the Chesapeake Bay  
21               watershed and the dissemination of perti-  
22               nent education materials oriented to vary-  
23               ing grade levels;

1 “(iv) demonstrate or disseminate envi-  
2 ronmental educational tools and materials  
3 related to the Chesapeake Bay watershed;

4 “(v) demonstrate field methods, prac-  
5 tices, and techniques, including assessment  
6 of environmental and ecological conditions  
7 and analysis of environmental problems;  
8 and

9 “(vi) build the capacity of school dis-  
10 tricts and their partners to deliver high-  
11 quality environmental education programs.

12 “(C) COORDINATION.—The Director shall  
13 implement the education and training program  
14 in coordination with the heads of other Federal  
15 agencies, as the Director determines appro-  
16 priate.

17 “(6) COASTAL LIVING RESOURCES MANAGE-  
18 MENT AND HABITAT PROGRAM.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
20 through the Director, may establish a Ches-  
21apeake Bay Coastal Living Resources Manage-  
22ment and Habitat Program to support coordi-  
23nated management, protection, characterization,  
24and restoration of priority Chesapeake Bay  
25habitats and living resources, including oysters,

1 blue crabs, submerged aquatic vegetation, and  
2 economically and ecologically important fish  
3 species such as striped bass and menhaden.

4 “(B) ACTIVITIES.—Under the Chesapeake  
5 Bay Coastal Living Resources Management and  
6 Habitat Program, the Director may carry out  
7 or enter into grants, contracts, and cooperative  
8 agreements and provide technical assistance to  
9 support—

10 “(i) native oyster research and res-  
11 toration;

12 “(ii) fish and shellfish aquaculture  
13 that is carried out in accordance with a  
14 valid Federal or State permit;

15 “(iii) the establishment of submerged  
16 aquatic vegetation restoration programs;

17 “(iv) the development of programs  
18 that restore, protect, and build the resil-  
19 ience of critical coastal habitats and com-  
20 munities;

21 “(v) habitat mapping, characteriza-  
22 tion, and assessment techniques necessary  
23 to identify, assess, and monitor Chesa-  
24 peake Bay conditions and restoration ac-  
25 tions;

1           “(vi) the application and transfer of  
2           applied scientific research and ecosystem  
3           management tools to fisheries and habitat  
4           managers;

5           “(vii) the collection, synthesis, and  
6           sharing of information to inform and influ-  
7           ence coastal and living resource manage-  
8           ment issues;

9           “(viii) ecologically and economically  
10          important fish and shellfish research; and

11          “(ix) other activities that the Director  
12          determines are appropriate to carry out  
13          the purposes of the program.

14          “(d) DELEGATION.—

15               “(1) AUTHORITY.—The Administrator shall del-  
16               egate to the Director such authority as may be nec-  
17               essary to carry out this section.

18               “(2) STAFF.—The Administrator shall delegate  
19               to the Director appropriate staff representing exper-  
20               tise that covers the breadth of the functions of the  
21               Office.

22          “(e) REPORTS.—

23               “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
24               through the Director, shall biennially submit to Con-  
25               gress and the Secretary of Commerce a report on

1 the activities of the Office and progress made in pro-  
2 tecting and restoring the living resources and habi-  
3 tat of the Chesapeake Bay.

4 “(2) ACTION PLAN.—Each report required by  
5 paragraph (1) shall include an action plan for the 2-  
6 year period following submission of the report, con-  
7 sisting of—

8 “(A) a list of recommended research, moni-  
9 toring, and data collection activities necessary  
10 to continue implementation of the strategy  
11 under subsection (b)(2); and

12 “(B) recommendations to integrate activi-  
13 ties of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
14 Administration with the activities of the part-  
15 ners in the Chesapeake Bay Program to meet  
16 the commitments of the Chesapeake Bay Agree-  
17 ment and subsequent agreements.

18 “(f) AGREEMENTS.—

19 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator,  
20 through the Director, may enter into and perform  
21 such contracts, leases, grants, or cooperative agree-  
22 ments as may be necessary to carry out the purposes  
23 of this Act.

24 “(2) USE OF OTHER RESOURCES.—For pur-  
25 poses related to the understanding, protection, and

1 restoration of the Chesapeake Bay, the Director may  
 2 use, with consent and with or without reimburse-  
 3 ment, the land, services, equipment, personnel, and  
 4 facilities of—

5 “(A) any Department, agency, or instru-  
 6 mentality of the United States; or

7 “(B) any State, local government, or In-  
 8 dian Tribe, or any political subdivision thereof.

9 “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

10 “(1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term ‘Adminis-  
 11 trator’ means the Administrator of the National  
 12 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

13 “(2) CHESAPEAKE BAY AGREEMENT; CHESA-  
 14 PEAKE BAY ECOSYSTEM; CHESAPEAKE BAY PRO-  
 15 GRAM; CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.—The  
 16 terms ‘Chesapeake Bay Agreement’, ‘Chesapeake  
 17 Bay ecosystem’, ‘Chesapeake Bay Program’, and  
 18 ‘Chesapeake Executive Council’ have the meanings  
 19 given those terms in section 117(a) of the Federal  
 20 Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1267(a)).

21 “(3) DIRECTOR.—The term ‘Director’ means  
 22 the Director of the Office.

1           “(4) OFFICE.—The term ‘Office’ means the  
2       Chesapeake Bay Office established under this sec-  
3       tion.”.

