

January 21, 2009

Honorable Kent County Commissioners
400 High Street
Chestertown, MD 21620

Dear President Crow and Commissioners Fithian and Pickrum:

I am writing in support of the testimony of Chester **RIVERKEEPER**® Tom Leigh on Tuesday, January 27, concerning nitrogen-reducing septic systems. The Sassafra River Association (SRA) strongly supports legislation to require the installation of such systems in all new construction and for the replacement of all failed systems in the Kent County Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

For more than 4 years, the members of the SRA (500 and growing) have been educating themselves about issues affecting water quality in our watershed, a precious natural and economic resource of Kent County. It is well-established that septic systems provide more than 10 percent of the nitrogen load state-wide (MDE). In our rural watershed, where septic systems predominate and some other Bay-wide nutrient sources (such as urban stormwater run-off) are absent, that percentage is likely higher.

Traditional septic systems – even when they are well-maintained and functioning properly – are not designed to reduce the flow of nutrients into our groundwater. As you are aware, new septic system denitrifying technologies have been developed, certified as effective, and successfully installed in Kent County with the support of the Bay Restoration Fund.

Kent County has been a leader in protecting farmland and preserving the rural character of the Eastern Shore. Enacting legislation to require nitrogen-reducing septic systems in new Critical Area construction and in the replacement of failed systems offers another opportunity for Kent County to be a leader in conserving our natural resources. At present, installation of nitrogen-reducing systems – including for new construction -- can be funded through the State's Bay Restoration Fund at no cost to the homeowner. Even if it were not, however, the marginal cost of these systems represents a miniscule percentage of the cost of constructing a new home. Their beneficial effects on the health of our rivers and the Chesapeake Bay argue in favor of mandating these systems in new construction and the replacement of failed systems.

We would be pleased to provide additional information on this subject and would welcome an opportunity to discuss this important issue further.

Sincerely,

Kascie Herron
Sassafra **RIVERKEEPER**