The General Assembly session started on January 10, and your South RIVERKEEPER® has already begun working on four important bills for this year.

- **Forest Conservation Act:** The Forest Conservation Act was passed in 1991. Since then, very little of the law has changed, but as we all know, the landscape in our watershed (and our State) has changed a great deal. This year’s push will be to clarify the definition of “priority forest” in the law, require more reforestation for clearing of priority forest, provide flexibility to local governments’ use of fee-in-lieu funds, and require updates to the 1997 Technical Manual. This approach is narrower than last year’s across-the-board reforestation attempt, and if passed will protect a great deal more of our best forests in the State.

- **Polystyrene Foam Ban:** Better known as Styrofoam, polystyrene foam is a dangerous plastic, for our waterways and for our health. Foam breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces as it passes through the waste stream and into our River, eventually winding up in our fish and shellfish. Along the way, foam soaks up almost 10x more toxins than other plastics, and allows these toxins to bio-accumulate in aquatic life and ourselves when we eat seafood. Our trash trap in Crab Creek has captured over a thousand pieces of foam since installation in June 2017. With the ready availability of eco-friendly and cost-comparable alternatives, the time to ban foam is now.

- **Erosion & Sediment Control Reporting:** A law is only as good as its enforcement. In FY 2016, Anne Arundel County required 11 staff to conduct 9380 erosion and sediment control inspections, which found 928 violations. Yet only 133 of these violations received a penalty. This bill requires all local jurisdictions with authority to enforce State sediment and erosion control laws (like Anne Arundel County) to provide annual public reporting on their enforcement efforts. Currently, this information is not widely available, and contains only sparse enforcement data. We expect the requirement to publicly report on violation numbers, enforcement efforts, and staffing needs will incentivize local governments to generate the political will and necessary resources for robust enforcement of our environmental laws, and help keep the River clean.

- **Septic Systems:** Over 40,000 septic systems in Anne Arundel County contribute over a million pounds of nitrogen to our waterways every year. The River is impaired for fecal coliform and nitrogen. Many other jurisdictions throughout the State suffer similar septic system pollution. This year SRF and others are pushing a bill that would require any new septic systems installed within 1000 ft of a nitrogen-impaired stream to use Best-Available Technology. This requirement will cut the nitrogen load from conventional septic systems in half, from about 23 pounds per year to 11, protecting our streams, rivers, the Bay, and our groundwater from nitrogen pollution.

As the session continues and the bills make their way through committees and floor votes, we will be sending action alerts and asking for your help to see that these important legislative priorities succeed. Thank you for your ongoing engagement and support!