

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 18, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write in regard to the EPA decision of August 23, 2017, to terminate an ongoing “Cooperative Agreement” with Bay Journal Media, Inc., publisher of the *Bay Journal* newspaper, a source of unique, environmentally focused content throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. We are deeply troubled by this agency action, which would eliminate 40 percent of the organization’s funding and imperil its future.

We are aware of no other examples of high-performing grantees having their EPA funding revoked under similar circumstances, meaning that this action sets a dangerous nationwide precedent. Most troubling, this decision also appears to be based on a flawed premise that the will of the U.S. Congress has somehow shifted away from supporting the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which could not be further from the truth.

When contacting Bay Journal Media via email that the agency was taking the highly irregular step of renegeing on what amounts to a five-year contract little more than a year into its life, the EPA said the action was due “to a shift in priorities.” Yet the U.S. Congress, which spoke very clearly to its priorities of elevating our national environmental stewardship when passing the Clean Water Act and subsequently creating the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program under its auspices decades ago, has expressed no such change in priorities.

Note, for example, that this summer the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee acted to advance the reauthorization the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program through 2022 at \$90 million per year. This is more than the program has ever been funded in its history.

Also note that this action builds on a series of intergovernmental agreements that identify the improved conservation of the Chesapeake Bay as a shared goal. In 2000, Congress directed the EPA to ensure that management plans are developed and implementation is begun to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. In June 2014, the governors of the six states in the watershed signed a new, voluntary Chesapeake Bay watershed agreement to work in partnership with the federal government through the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program.

The mission of Bay Journal Media is directly in line with the priorities of the Congress and other elected officials throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. *33 USC Section 1267*, which established the Chesapeake Bay Program, states that "The Chesapeake Bay Program Office shall provide support to the Chesapeake Executive Council by ... implementing outreach programs for public information, education, and participation to foster stewardship of the resources of the Chesapeake Bay." For more than a quarter-century, the *Bay Journal* has been a primary means through which that goal is advanced. We believe it has done a sterling job of delivering returns on investments.

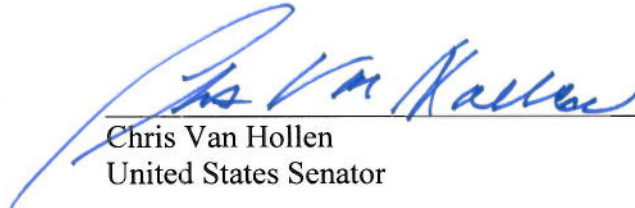
Your own agency has made this clear in its grant and performance evaluations. The most recent EPA performance review, issued only five months ago, said of the *Bay Journal*: "Continued outstanding work in producing independent editorial and news content pertinent to the general public interest in Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts. The most comprehensive coverage of Bay related issues within the watershed. Excellent production in meeting the grant requirements and establishing the standard for coverage of Chesapeake Bay related issues."

There exists no legitimate cause to deprive the residents of the Chesapeake Bay watershed of such a vital source of information. In our conversations, you have voiced support for the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, so we do not doubt that you understand the importance of sharing the news about the progress we make together. As such, we urge you to immediately reconsider the EPA decision not to continue supporting this coverage.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator