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Chesapeake Executive Council adopts diversity statement

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam takes over as chair as region's leaders address Bay restoration in the face of COVID-19



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Annapolis, MD—Representatives from the six Chesapeake Bay watershed states, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) met today for the annual meeting of the Chesapeake Executive Council.

Established 37 years ago, the [Chesapeake Executive Council](#), is responsible for guiding the policy agenda and setting conservation and restoration goals for the Chesapeake Bay Program, a regional watershed partnership. Members include the governors of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, the mayor of the District of Columbia, the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the administrator of the EPA on behalf of the federal government.

In what has become the new norm, members met virtually for the first time to discuss the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon their respective jurisdictions and how the continued investment in Bay restoration can be used to help the economy and public health of the region.

“As our country works to overcome a pandemic and a legacy of racial injustice, we need to have safe and accessible public spaces to recreate; places to interact with nature; sustainable, locally-produced food; clean air and water,” said Chesapeake Bay Commission Chair Gene Yaw. “When our local communities have clean water, the Chesapeake Bay will also have clean water, at no additional cost.”

However, the defining moment of this annual meeting was the adoption by the Executive Council of a historic statement re-affirming the commitment of the partnership in embracing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in all forms, which was first included as an [outcome](#) in the most recent [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#). The [Statement in Support of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice](#) commits the Chesapeake Bay Program to strengthen and improve diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in all areas of the partnership, recruit and retain staff and volunteers that reflect the diversity of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, foster a culture of inclusion and respect across all partner organizations and ensure the benefits of our science, restoration and partnership programs are distributed equitably without disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations.

Maryland Governor Larry Hogan reflected on his past three years as chair of the Executive Council before symbolically handing over the reins to Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, who was unanimously elected by the other members to succeed him.

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“In my past three years as chair, we have worked together to implement real, bipartisan, common sense solutions to the challenges facing the Chesapeake Bay, and the results speak for themselves,” stated Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. “Maryland remains fully committed to this partnership as we continue making strides to preserve this national treasure.”

The Chesapeake Bay Program is governed by the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#), which was signed by the Executive Council in 2014. It envisions fostering an environmentally and economically sustainable watershed with clean water, abundant life, conserved lands and access to the water, a vibrant cultural heritage, and a diversity of engaged citizens and stakeholders.

“I grew up on the Chesapeake Bay, and I am excited to take on the role of Chair of the Executive Council as we continue our critical restoration work,” said Virginia Governor Ralph Northam. “As my first official act as Chair, I call on the Council’s principal staff to immediately begin work on the diversity, equity, inclusion and justice goals adopted today. I look forward to working closely with my colleagues to build a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable Bay.”