

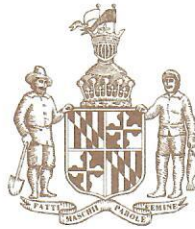
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Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair

Education, Business and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 282 – Maryland Forestry Education Fund - Establishment

February 8, 2023

Mister Chairman and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

Our forests are critically important to our environment. They cleanse the air we breathe, they filter the water we drink - which protects our rivers, the Chesapeake Bay and its habitat - and they act as an important buffer against climate change.

Educating our citizens about the importance of maintaining forest land has long been a priority in our state. Twenty years ago, the state Forest Service within the Department of Natural Resources had an education program that conducted seminars, school programs, and other educational outreach programs that taught that forests were about more than just trees. Unfortunately, that program was eliminated when the agency was downsized, and Maryland Forest Service still does not have enough staff to conduct significant outreach and education about our forests.

Senate Bill 282 will create a Maryland Forest Education Fund that would provide education and resources to Maryland's forest landowners and local governments for purposes, such as healthy forest management, climate science, forest conservation, urban forestry, and other related purposes. This fund will add to and enhance work being done by the Maryland Forestry Foundation (an independent 501c3), local district forestry boards and community forestry programs, which were created as a means of outreach to forest landowners.

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation in support of planting and maintaining five million native trees in the State by 2031. A key focus of that legislation was supporting tree equity through targeted native tree planting in underserved urban communities. Senate Bill 282 and The Maryland Forest Education Fund complements that 2021 legislation and will help to educate all landowners about the importance of healthy forest management.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 282.