

# TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1284

My name is Fred Trenkle. I am 70 years old and have been a lifelong resident of Catonsville, Baltimore County and Maryland.

In February 1988, I decided to move from an apartment to a relatively new townhome in Catonsville. I looked at many other houses, but I liked the layout of this house, its proximity to my parents' home in Catonsville and the public transportation from Catonsville into Baltimore. I was initially hesitant about buying this house because it was so close to the shopping centers on Route 40. However, there was a dense forest that shielded our neighborhood from that area and, especially in the summer, you would not even know that it was there.

Those woods were really a part of our world. There were tree frogs singing in early spring. There were hundreds of birds. There were deer and foxes and rabbits and even an occasional possum. The trees were beautiful in the fall and with snow on their branches in the winter. Although there was a marshy area just beyond my property, it never expanded much beyond that area.

I have been a lifelong supporter of environmental causes. I have consistently voted for candidates who were sympathetic to environmental concerns. I am a Life Member of the Sierra Club and have been a member for more than 40 years. I was recycling my paper, glass and other items before Baltimore County even started collecting them.

Over the past 5 years we received several notices about work that Baltimore County was doing to manage the forest and the small stream that went through it. Sometime after the historic flooding that occurred in 2018, the county rebuilt the drainage area that was behind the houses further down the street. The earth moving equipment that was used for this damaged the grass barrier between our houses and the woods. The county reseeded it and has even maintained it over the years.

In 2021 I saw some county employees surveying the wood area and we received notice about a stream restoration project. However, we received no subsequent information, so we did not know the status of that project or even if it was going to happen. Frequently, I would ask my neighbors, "Have you heard anything about the restoration project?" No one had heard anything.

Then in November 2022, many of us received a letter from Ms. Jena Smolko, a Baltimore County engineer, notifying us that the project would start shortly. The letter said that the work would involve heavy equipment and the removal of "some trees".

The work began around Thanksgiving 2022. It involved two crews and several pieces of heavy equipment. The project was fenced off so residents had limited access to the work area. The work continued every day from 7:30 until 3:30 until late February 2023. There was constant noise from power saws, earth moving equipment and trucks.

Initially, only a few trees were removed. Then a few more. Then a few more and so on. Some have asked why we didn't complain to the county government about what was happening. Really, the process was gradual, and no one really knew when it was going to end. It was also during the holiday season when many of us had many other things to do. Some of us, myself included, thought that maybe what was being done was environmentally sound.

Fast forward to February 2023. What did our forest look like? The construction crews removed several hundred trees. They planted some type of grasses which are brown for most of the year. Some trees were planted. Most appear to be slow growing. I will probably be long dead before they

amount to anything. We no longer have a barrier between our neighborhood and the shopping center. We now have all of the noise and visual pollution associated with that. In addition, adjacent to the shopping center is a school bus company which houses as many as 50 buses. The woods had muffled the sounds from that facility, but no more. In early morning and late afternoon, there is a smell of diesel fuel and the constant beeping of buses backing up.

Two county representatives finally met with us in September 2023 to hear the concerns of our neighborhood. They touted the many benefits of this construction and its beneficial impact on the Chesapeake Bay. They said that new wildlife was present in the stream which had not been there before, especially touting the presence of frogs and minnows. They boasted of the planting of new trees.

There was no mention of what had been removed. Instead of hundreds of birds, I guess that we now have minnows. In place of a verdant healthy green forest, we now have brown grasslands. A neighbor of mine once remarked about how peaceful and quiet our neighborhood was. Those days are gone. The marsh that was behind my house has now grown into a large pond and, in periods of heavy rain, expands up to 5 houses beyond mine. I don't know whether that was part of the plan or just something that was unexpected.

We have come to learn more about this and similar projects through conversations with Delegate Sheila Ruth and Councilman Pat Young. My neighbor, Judy Sammel, has done a lot of research. We found out that the removal of trees had nothing to do with the elimination of stream sediment. The trees were simply collateral damage because they were in the path of the earth moving equipment that was used to rebuild the stream. We have learned about the trading of pollution reduction credits and the federal money used to support these projects. And we have learned that the Maryland Department of the Environment is really the driving force behind this program and that there are many other communities throughout the state experiencing what we have experienced.

I should say, in all fairness, not everyone is upset about what has been done in our neighborhood. Some people say that the forest kept people from enjoying this area. It is now easier to hike through the area or even take a shortcut to the stores on Route 40. Some parents say that their children can benefit from the restored stream and the wildlife growing in it. I do have to say, however, that this is a minority view. Most of my neighbors, and even those whose houses do not border on the restoration area, are unhappy with what was done.

I would invite anyone who is skeptical about this to come to our neighborhood on Winehurst Road in Catonsville. Take a look what was done. Is this truly a good way to "restore" a stream and reduce sediment flowing into the Chesapeake Bay?

I am so happy that this bill is now being proposed. Will it make a difference? Absolutely! We were not given proper information about the project before it started. If there was a period for comments, this was certainly unknown to the inhabitants of my street. Simply posting the notice on a Baltimore County website or a Facebook page is not sufficient. If we had been given complete information about the stream restoration plan, I feel certain that most of my neighbors and I would have strenuously objected to the plan. I love the portion of this bill related to the retention of trees. How can someone claiming to be an environmentalist agree to the removal of so many trees? If we had the opportunity to provide input to the plan, we would certainly not have agreed to the wholesale destruction of a forest.

For my entire life, I have believed in the power that our government has to do good things for so many people. When a government agency is fighting climate change, overcoming disease or helping a needy family to find affordable housing, it is doing something that no private enterprise can do. There may have been some well meaning people involved in this stream restoration project. However, the work that they have done is certainly not something positive for our community like the other examples I have cited. Government agencies, like everything else need to have rules and need to be held accountable. This important regulation will certainly do so for this stream restoration process. I thank Delegates Ruth, Terrasa and Lehman who took the time to come to our neighborhood and view the results of the stream restoration. I applaud them for proposing this bill. This is a true example of good government.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill!

Fred Trenkle  
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