



March 4, 2024

To the Maryland House Environment Transportation Committee,

The Baltimore Tree Trust supports House Bill 1358 "Natural Resources – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park".

Baltimore Tree Trust, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, is Baltimore's pre-eminent Urban Forestry and tree planting organization. Our mission is to increase Baltimore's Urban Tree Canopy for all of the benefits a healthy and robust tree canopy provides for the residents of Baltimore. Foundational to this work is the relationship between people and trees. Negative perceptions of trees and forests among residents directly impede our tree planting efforts, adversely affecting our neighborhoods of focus. GFLP faces a significant, deeply rooted perception issue, leading to unfavorable attitudes towards forests and trees.

A century of disinvestment, racism, and environmental injustices have plagued Gwynns Falls Leakin Park with challenges.. House Bill 1358 aims to invest resources, enhance infrastructure, and generally improve Gwynns Falls Leakin Park. Improvements to the park will positively influence how Baltimore City residents perceive the forests of Gwynns Falls Leakin Park, thereby fostering more positive connections with outdoor spaces and trees.

Further, we believe this bill will allow Baltimore City to re-focus resources towards other park spaces available to residents, with particular attention to the smaller neighborhood green spaces where Baltimore residents regularly interact with and reap the benefits of trees.

It is important to note Baltimore City Forestry has been doing important work within Gwynns Falls Leakin Park that we hope this partnership process considers and incorporates. Specifically, the Forest Management plan (referred to as the Biohabitats study) and the related invasive species management work are positive steps BCRP Forestry have made towards improving the forests in Gwynns Falls Leakin Park, and should be encouraged and supported.

House Bill 1358 will directly and indirectly improve Baltimore City residents' connections with trees and nature. This investment into Gwynns Falls Leakin Park would benefit Baltimore's trees and forests for generations of Baltimoreans

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryant Smith", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Bryant Smith
Executive Director
Baltimore Tree Trust