

SB 969 – State Transfer Tax – Whole Watershed Act
Hearing Date – March 26, 2024 1 pm
Position – Support with Amendment

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

The undersigned land trusts support the goal of the Whole Watershed Act to concentrate restoration efforts in specific watersheds, where measurable progress can be observed.

We request that item VI, lines 4-8 on page 5 be removed from the bill. This section allows an unspecified portion of MALPF funds to “provide funding for the whole watershed fund”.

The MALPF program is very much defined by Maryland statute. Each county has a volunteer land preservation board that recommends MALPF projects to the state MALPF board. There are round one and round two easement purchase offers that have very specific selection criteria.

It is difficult to see how the current legislative MALPF structure would allow for additional funds to be used for land preservation easements in the selected watersheds. The language could however create confusion, about a potential reallocation of funds from land preservation to “**projects that occur on land subject to an agricultural land preservation easement**”.

For this reason, we respectfully request that the following section be struck from the legislation.

(VI) ~~TO~~ CONSISTENT WITH THE PURPOSES SPECIFIED IN ITEMS (I) THROUGH (V) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE WHOLE WATERSHED FUND ESTABLISHED UNDER § 8-2B-03 OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES ARTICLE, INCLUDING FOR PROJECTS THAT OCCUR ON LAND SUBJECT TO AN AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION EASEMENT.

Sincerely,

Ann H. Jones, Executive Director
Baltimore County Land Trust Alliance

David Lillard, Executive Director
Catocin Land Trust

Alissa Webb, Executive Director
Cecil Land Trust

Steve Kline, Executive Director
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy

Kirstin Kirkwood, Executive Director
Harford Land Trust

Matt Heim, Executive Director
Lower Shore Land Trust

Renee Hamidi, Executive Director
The Valleys Planning Council