



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

March 25, 2025

Hon. Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: HB0717 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Feldman,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of HB0717**.

In an uncertain budget climate, we feel this bill is critical and will allow the state to build on investments first made during the Great Maryland Outdoors Act that make our public lands more accessible and resilient. It accomplishes this by enabling partnerships and providing for innovative redeployment of acquisition funds toward immediate public lands' needs.

First, this bill addresses the ongoing need to activate and care for our public lands by allowing stateside Program Open Space funding (exceeding \$80M in any FY) to be deployed to support stewardship, maintenance, and operation of state lands and parks. The legislation will also increase private support by enabling the department to enter into agreements with foundations for the various public land units with a focus on increasing private philanthropic support. Just like the state, counties and municipalities need to make local parks accessible which this bill will support via flexibility with local park dollars. Once a county hits its land protection goals, this legislation allows for local side Program Open Space to be used on park improvements, care, and maintenance.

This bill also focuses on the plan for future workforce needs, instead of buying land and determining how to staff it later, this bill will require the department and DBM to identify necessary staffing levels at the outset – so Marylanders enjoy the benefit of a well-maintained and appropriately staffed park – from rangers to lifeguards. We support this legislation as we believe its passage would enhance the Department of Natural Resources' efforts to maintain historic resources under the agency's care and also address challenges the agency and its partners face in making public lands more accessible.

HB0717 is an important piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Favorable

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO