



PARTNERS for
OPEN SPACE

The Nature Conservancy
Josh Kurtz

Grow and Fortify
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Chesapeake Conservancy
Joel Dunn

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Charlotte Davis

Baltimore County Land
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Ann Jones

Chesapeake Bay
Commission
Mark Hoffman

The Conservation Fund
Bill Crouch

Lower Shore Land Trust
Josh Hastings

Preservation Maryland
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Maryland Association of
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Sue Simmons

Maryland League of
Conservation Voters
Kristen Harbeson

Maryland Recreation and
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Chuck Montrie

Forever Maryland
Foundation
Wendy Stringfellow

Southern Maryland
Heritage Area Consortium
Lucille Walker

Trust for Public Land
Kent Whitehead

Eastern Shore
Land Conservancy
Katie Parks

The Honorable Guy J. Guzzone
Budget and Taxation Committee
Maryland State Senate
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable James C. Rosapepe
Budget and Taxation Committee
Maryland State Senate
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Guzzone and Vice Chair Rosapepe:

On behalf of Partners for Open Space, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the **Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) of 2020 (Senate Bill 192)**. This legislation includes a provision that would impact legislatively-mandated repayments for the state's premier 'green capital' program, Program Open Space (Page 35, lines 23-26).

In the 2019 General Assembly session, \$43.9 million in Program Open Space repayment funds scheduled for fiscal year (FY) 2020 were fenced off and remain unappropriated. In its current draft, the 2020 BRFA alters the Program Open Space repayment schedule by repealing the repayments for FY20 and extending the repayment by a year. This marks yet another year in which the repayment schedule has been altered and funding has been pushed forward into an uncertain future.

Program Open Space repayments, originally mandated according to a 2016 statute (Chapter 10) and passed unanimously by both chambers, respond to a history of cuts to the dedicated fund. Since the program's beginning in 1969, more than \$1.3 billion in transfer tax revenues dedicated for Program Open Space and its related land preservation programs have been diverted to the General Fund for other unrelated uses, and only half of this funding has been replaced. In passing the 2016 Chapter 10 law, Maryland's General Assembly recognized the need to honor its commitment and repay Program Open Space.

This year you are deliberating on a budget built on strong revenue forecasts based on a healthy and growing economy. In FY 2021, Maryland has the resources available to honor its commitment and stick to the adopted Program Open Space repayment schedule. This may not be the case in future budget years.

Our state is grappling with the impacts of rapid land-use change, the loss of natural areas, and the impacts of global climate change on Maryland residents and its environment. We submit that now is not the time to further delay payments to a program that, by its very nature, assists in reducing the carbon footprint of future land use decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter that will have significant and lasting impacts on the health and well-being of Maryland's people and its environment.

Sincerely,

Josh Kurtz
Chair, Partners for Open Space

To learn more, please visit www.partnersforopenspace.org