
**PARTNERS for
OPEN SPACE**

The Nature Conservancy
Josh Kurtz

Grow and Fortify
Kelly Dudeck

Chesapeake Conservancy
Joel Dunn

Rural Maryland Council
Charlotte Davis

**Baltimore County Land
Trust Alliance**
Ann Jones

**Chesapeake Bay
Commission**
Mark Hoffman

The Conservation Fund
Bill Crouch

Lower Shore Land Trust
Josh Hastings

Preservation Maryland
Nick Redding

**Maryland Association of
County Parks and
Recreation Administrators**
Sue Simmons

**Maryland League of
Conservation Voters**
Kristen Harbeson

**Maryland Recreation and
Parks Association**
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 Kumar P. Barve
Environment and Transportation
Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Environment and Transportation
Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barve and Vice Chair Stein:

I am writing on behalf of Partners for Open Space, a statewide coalition of agricultural, recreation, environmental, and historic preservation organizations. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Urban Agriculture Grant Program (H.B. 1534). This bill would establish an urban agriculture grant program administered by the Department of Agriculture to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods.

Partners for Open Space would like to express its full support for such a program that would expand urban access to locally grown foods and economic opportunities. However, we are concerned with the bill's proposed funding source for the grant program, which is the state share of Program Open Space. As described in the fiscal note for H.B. 1534, Program Open Space funds are used for acquiring and improving outdoor recreation and open space areas for the public, and for preserving natural areas that have high ecological value. The state's share of Program Open Space is directed to land acquisition, capital development, and a \$6 million dollar direct grant to the City of Baltimore for park projects which complements the city's Program Open Space local share.

Partners for Open Space believes that the state share of Program Open Space is not an appropriate source of funding for an agricultural grant program because such a program would not expand public access to natural lands and parks, and it would not protect lands with high ecological value. 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. Furthermore, with increasing demand for outdoor recreation and open space, Maryland's state and local parks will require the appropriate resources to meet this growing demand.

We respectfully request that the Environment and Transportation Committee amend the funding source for H.B. 1534 so that the funding source may be best aligned with the purpose of the agricultural grant program.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Josh Kurtz
Chair, Partners for Open Space