

House Ways and Means Committee
February 27, 2020
Testimony on HB 1146 - SUPPORT
Forest Conservation – Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund – Distribution of
Agricultural Land Transfer Tax Revenue

Jolie McCathran
Member, Montgomery County Forestry Board

Maryland's Forestry Boards would like to see more land under forest conservation or forest management plans. Forestland under such plans have a tax incentive to stay forest cover. While the number of entirely wooded parcels in Maryland has certainly declined, State Department of Assessments and Taxation data on transfer tax receipts infer that they may no longer exist at all in certain parts of the state. For example, the most heavily wooded county in the state, Garrett County, produced zero acres of entirely wooded property sold subject to the agricultural transfer tax between 2008 and 2015.

The States Forestry Boards thinks this legislation boils down to the question of how badly does the legislature want to see forests cared for? If they're not willing to risk some adjustment in MALPF funding to pay for forests, then maybe perhaps we need to challenge you to find another tax natural to support forest management.

Maryland has done an excellent job of preserving forests from conversion; however, despite that success we do a poor job of taking care of those same forests we've preserved.

Our imminent challenge isn't just saving the forests; it's getting them back to being healthy. It's enlisting over 150,000 private forest landowners to be good stewards.

This bill uniquely—and better than most legislation offered in the past decade—does that.

We strongly urge you to put a higher priority of forest management and support this HB 1146.