



ANACOSTIA WATERSHED SOCIETY

March 29, 2021

In **OPPOSITION** to HB 991 Natural Resources – Forest Mitigation Banks – Qualified Preservation

Dear Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Anacostia Watershed Society to urge you to **OPPOSE** HB 991, the Natural Resources – Forest Mitigation Banks – Qualified Preservation bill.

The Anacostia Watershed Society is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1989 to restore and protect the Anacostia River and its watershed communities. Reforestation is among our priorities, recognizing the value of a robust tree cover in our increasingly developed metro area. We are losing what fragments of forests remain, and healthy urban communities cannot sustain a net loss of trees.

Two years ago, the Maryland General Assembly directed a forest mitigation study to assess and clarify forest mitigation banking practices. This study is ongoing. HB 991 is therefore a premature bill, and should be held by the Committee until the requested forest mitigation study has been completed and reviewed.

Maryland is losing some 3,000 acres of forest every year, and development is the single largest driver of forest loss in our state. Maryland's Forest Conservation Act, passed in 1991, currently requires replanting of trees to offset losses on development sites. If adopted, HB 991 would weaken existing tree replacement requirements by enabling development projects to potentially remove up to 100% of the forest on a site with no replanting required at all. This is unacceptable.

Forest conservation can only be realized with appropriate tools and guidelines in place to truly mitigate losses. It is critical that the General Assembly not attempt to address forest mitigation practices piecemeal, but rather wait to make well-informed decisions based on the information in the forest mitigation study the General Assembly itself requested in 2019 via SB 729.

The Anacostia Watershed Society respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report from this Committee on HB 991.

Thank you for your consideration.

Erin Borgeson Castelli
Interim President/CEO

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Interim President/CEO

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