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Committee: Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: HB0991 - Natural Resources--Forest Mitigation Banks--Qualified Preservation

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Hearing Date: March 31, 2021

Bill Contact: Delegate Jim Gilchrist

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep all the members of our communities healthy and safe in a clean environment and that address equity for all residents in our communities. DTMG strongly **opposes** HB0991 because it will undercut the protections in the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) and will protect fewer forests and lead to faster loss of forests in Maryland. This will be bad for the health of all Maryland residents and significantly hamper our ability to fight climate change.

Maryland needs as many forests as possible, a fact recognized by this Committee when it passed the Climate Solutions Now bill (SB0414) requiring the planting of 5 million new native trees by 2030! We pay for forest loss in ecological, economic, and health costs.

Forests fight climate change. HB0991 will undercut one of the major benefits of the Climate Solutions Now bill which requires planting 5 million trees. Every acre of forest saved sequesters enough carbon dioxide to equal the annual emissions of over 50 cars.

Forests also create clean drinking water. A survey of 27 water suppliers found that for every 10% increase in forest cover upstream of water intakes, treatment and chemical costs decreased by approximately 20%.

Forests improve human health in several ways: Forests clean our air. In addition to absorbing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, forests absorb harmful air particulates as well as noxious gases, such as sulfur dioxide. Views of nature and “forest bathing” – just walking in the forest – have been shown to reduce stress. Studies show that populations living near forested areas also have lower rates of asthma, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Loss of forests also cost taxpayer money. In the past 45 years, the loss of forests in the Baltimore-Washington region alone caused a 19% increase in polluted runoff costing us over \$1 billion, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Meanwhile, Bay

taxpayers spend billions on projects to filter polluted runoff, which forests do for free. As more landscapes turn into shopping centers, subdivisions, and parking lots, we are forced to construct expensive man-made projects that divert and filter polluted water running off the asphalt. Many local governments are financially burdened by this work.

The amount of mitigation required by the FCA already results in forest loss. The FCA has significant loopholes that allow nearly a dozen acres of forest to be lost every day in Maryland. In many planning zones, two-thirds of a fully forested parcel can be cleared before onsite or offsite mitigation is required. In the rare case where mitigation is required, only one acre of mitigation is needed for every four acres taken down.

HB0991 will further erode protection of our forests and goes against the recent opinion of the Maryland Attorney General that clarified the parameters for how counties use forest mitigation banks. In effect, HB0991 would save only half (or fewer) of the forests that were being preserved last year.

The current mitigation requirements in Maryland already result in forest loss, and HB0991 would result in even more loss. This is harmful to our health, our wallets and our climate. **For these reasons, DTMG strongly opposes HB0991 and urges an UNFAVORABLE report from this Committee.**

Respectfully submitted,

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