



## **HB 991 - Natural Resources – Forest Mitigation Banks – Qualified Preservation - OPPOSE**

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee Members:

Blue Water Baltimore is the watershed-based nonprofit focused on improving water quality and community resilience within Baltimore City and Baltimore County, and home to the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper. We routinely plant hundreds of trees every year to increase our region's forest canopy, improve the health of our air and waterways, and mitigate the climate change-induced urban heat increasingly affecting residents in Baltimore City and County. Simply put, Maryland needs MORE trees, not less, and we believe HB991 will reverse decades of policy and on-the-ground work to increase our forest resources in Maryland. As such, we respectfully request an **UNFAVORABLE report on HB991**.

The benefits of trees and forests are well understood. Trees absorb pollution from the water and air, reduce summer heat and stormwater flooding in our communities, and capture CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases, reducing the impacts of climate change and development activities. **The Maryland Senate just passed the Climate Solutions Now Act, which included public funding for the planting of 5 Million trees over the next 10 years in recognition that trees are critical to reducing the impacts of climate change on our neighborhoods, air, and water.** Every effort must be made to both protect existing healthy trees AND accelerate the planting and replanting of more trees if we hope to meet our Bay Restoration goals for clean water, our existing State policy of “No Net Loss” of forests or meaningfully reduce climate impacts in our most populous jurisdictions.

For decades, mitigation of forests and other natural resources lost to development and land clearing has always included a specific sequence: first avoiding impacts to the resource, followed by minimization of planned impacts, and ultimately mitigation of lost resources. Mitigation has concentrated on replacing the lost resource or paying into a fund that aggregates small payments to replace larger areas of impacted resources. The rise of “mitigation banks” supported the science showing greater ecological benefits could be realized from larger, perpetually protected restored areas.

HB991 changes the very definition of a forest mitigation bank. Instead of defining “mitigation” as planting or replanting new trees, HB 991 allows for after-the-fact preservation of existing trees to meet the definition of “mitigation banking”. Functionally, this bill will result in clear-cutting of forests and mature trees for development, without ANY requirement for planting more trees elsewhere. **State and local governments will have to drastically increase their expenditure of public funds for tree plantings nearly everywhere to keep pace with climate change, Chesapeake Bay Restoration goals, and the State's policy of No Net Loss.** This is short-sighted and unwarranted.

For these reasons, Blue Water Baltimore, on behalf of our thousands of members and supporters, respectfully requests an UNFAVORABLE report on HB 991. Thank you.