



MARBIDCO
growing rural ventures™

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
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Mary Shank Creek, *Chair* / Stephen R. McHenry, *Executive Director*

TESTIMONY STATEMENT

BILL: Senate Bill 791 (Natural Resources – Land Conservation – Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act))

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation, and Education, Health, and the Environment

DATE: March 2, 2022

POSITION: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports Senate Bill 791, which does the following: sets a new State goal of 30% of Maryland land conserved by 2030; creates a “Greenspace Equity Program” and “Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Fund” and supports greater sustainable forestry through the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund. Over the past 50 years, more than one million acres of forestland and farmland were developed in Maryland. This bill will provide important assistance in helping to protect open spaces and rural working lands that will ultimately serve to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Maryland in the future.

MARBIDCO was an active member of an informal workgroup consisting of more than 15 farm, forestry and conservation organizations that held several meetings during the 2021 Interim to develop recommendations for a more supportive open space preservation, forest and farmland protection, and agricultural policy, that included a special emphasis on developing urban agricultural opportunities across the State. A focus on diversity, equity and inclusion was a guiding principle in these discussions. Senate Bill 791 supports the implementation of four of the workgroup’s recommendations.

Establishing a 30% Goal of Maryland Land Conserved

Senate Bill 791 establishes a statewide land conservation goal for the State to protect 30% of its lands by 2030 and 40% by 2040 to ensure that open space for nature, parks and local agriculture and forestry is part of Maryland’s future. The Smart Growth Subcabinet will work with State and local partners to track and implement.

Creating a Greenspace Equity Program

Senate Bill 791 creates a Greenspace Equity Program in which a land trust working in an underserved area, can apply to the Department of Natural Resources for grants to fund greenspace projects in underserved communities. Projects should enhance community greenspace which is defined to include community gardens and urban farms, community woodlands, parks, trails, community gathering open space area and a green networks (like a trail connector). Amendments have been developed to clarify how certain aspects of the Greenspace Equity Program would work for urban land trusts and nonprofit organizations to better reflect the intent of this legislation.

Creating a Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Fund

Senate Bill 791 creates a revolving loan fund, to be administered by the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET), to provide bridge loans to help land trusts work more quickly to conserve land from development. MET may designate a non-profit to run the program on its behalf. MARBIDCO sees this component of the bill as being a very useful complement to other efforts being undertaken to help facilitate the preservation of privately-owned rural working farm and forestland (and especially by MARBIDCO with respect to next generation farmers).

Increases Funding for the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund

Senate Bill 791 increases the funding to the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund to \$1 million annually beginning in FY 2024. The Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund supports stewardship efforts of private forest landowners through incentive programs like the Woodlands Incentives Program which provides cost sharing assistance for tree planting, site preparation and timber stand improvement practices. This is especially important funding considering private forest landowners own 2.2 million acres of timberland in Maryland.

As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report with Amendments Senate Bill 791.

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MARBIDCO was established by the Maryland General Assembly 15 years ago to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries to help bolster rural economies, support locally produced food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. MARBIDCO is a nimble, quasi-public financial intermediary organization which has a mission to serve exclusively the commercial farming, forestry, and seafood industries of Maryland. Assisting young and beginning farmers are a special focus for MARBIDCO, as is farm operation diversification (through value added processing activities). Commercial urban farming has also become a focus of MARBIDCO's efforts.

In delivering its financing programs, MARBIDCO works cooperatively with commercial banks and farm credit associations, as well as a host of federal, State, regional and local government agencies, and universities. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has approved 1056 financings totaling nearly \$80 million for food and fiber business projects located in of all Maryland's counties (including Baltimore City) – and in the process has leveraged more than \$170 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: www.marbidco.org.