



*Forming Faithful Stewards,
Caring for Sacred Waters*

PO Box 6791
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 8, 2022

Chair Guy Gazzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 791 – Maryland the Beautiful Act
Position: **Favorable with Amendments**

Dear Chair Gazzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

On behalf of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, I write to urge your support for the Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB 791), with amendments, to advance this bill favorably from committee.

Global leaders are calling for conserving 50% of Earth's landmass¹ in the fight of our lives: to combat climate change. This bill is Maryland's response to this global call to fight climate change. Our beautiful and diverse natural areas are also our best tool for climate resiliency. **With preserved forests, and increased greenspaces in urban centers, we can let nature do what it's designed to: sink carbon.**

Our world is losing species at an alarming rate: 1 million species, out of only 8 million species on the Earth, are threatened with extinction². This should alarm humans because without diverse species, we will lose essential food and medicinal sources. As people of faith, we should care about the species regardless of whether their loss will affect humans. But, for lawmakers like you, we understand that you answer to taxpayers. So, allow us to remind you that **when the planet suffers, we all suffer** – literally.

Maryland's thousands of acres of forestland serve as critical habitat for wildlife and diverse species of plants and fungi. As Maryland continues to grow, we must ensure that the natural world has space to do what it does best: **take care of us.**

Senate Bill 791 would achieve this by setting a goal for Maryland to have 30% of its lands conserved by 2030 and 40% by 2040. And we are already close: about 28% of Maryland's lands

¹ National Geographic, "Half of all land must be kept in a natural state to protect Earth," April 19, 2019.

² NPR WAMU 88.5, "1 Million Animal And Plant Species Are At Risk Of Extinction, U.N. Report Says," May 6, 2019.



are protected so far³. **Pushing us to the 40% by 2040 goal signals that we take seriously the well-being of all Marylanders.**

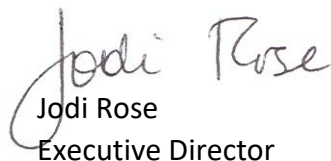
While these are ambitious goals, the bill includes actionable strategies for implementation. Senate Bill 791 would establish a new program called the “Greenspace Equity Program” to provide grants in underserved communities to create greenspace. Another program would create a Revolving Loan Fund for land trusts to help them compete in today’s real estate market. And thirdly, the bill expands the existing Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund to help private landowners steward forests on their properties.

Amendments proposed to the House Bill are attached, and we support similar amendments to the Senate version.

As people of faith, we are urgently called to address climate change and the threats to vulnerable communities and species. The Maryland the Beautiful Act works toward a future where natural areas are valued and protected, biodiversity is recognized as our tool to fight climate change, and money is devoted to drive community-based greenspace creation.

Thank you for considering our testimony, and I urge your support for SB 791.

Sincerely,


Jodi Rose
Executive Director

³ Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard, produced by the Maryland Department of Planning in coordination with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Agriculture, <https://maryland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/0f3ffd3350b24b17bd3b8e1705af3df5>.

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 1031

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 9, in line 4 after “MEANS:” strike beginning with line 4 through “MUNICIPALITY” in line 7 and substitute

- “(1) A LAND TRUST LOCATED OR WORKING IN AN UNDERSERVED AREA WHERE A PROJECT IS PROPOSED TO BE IMPLEMENTED
(2) A NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION WORKING UNDER A PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH A LAND TRUST IN AN UNDERSERVED AREA WHERE A PROJECT IS PROPOSED TO BE IMPLEMENTED; OR
(3) A COUNTY OR MUNICIPALITY”**

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 9, in line 17 after “ARTICLE,” insert “; AND

- (1) A HOUSING PROJECT AS DEFINED IN SECTION 12-101 OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ARTICLE
(2) AN AREA THAT HAS A HIGH CONCENTRATION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AS DEFINED AND UPDATED FROM TIME TO TIME BY THE US CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION’S SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX”**

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 11, in line 8 after “ORGANIZATIONS,” insert “

- (5) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL RESERVE AT LEAST 75% OF THE ANNUAL APPROPRIATION TO THE PROGRAM FOR GRANTS TO FUND PROJECTS LISTED IN 5-9D-02(F)(2)(I)”**