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March 8, 2022

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
Maryland State Senate
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Jim Rosapepe
Vice Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee
Maryland State Senate
101 James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy testimony for Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB 791) - Favorable

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and members of the committee,

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) supports SB 791- Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs, also popularly known as the Maryland the Beautiful Act, and urges a favorable report on the legislation sponsored by Senator Elfreth. Once passed, this legislation will set a statewide conservation goal, empower conservation efforts and make greenspace more equitable.

Maryland is often referred to as “America in miniature” due to its diverse landscape, from the mountains in the western region to the Atlantic Ocean along the coast of the Eastern Shore. Our state relies heavily on agriculture as it is the largest commercial industry in the state and employs around 350,000 people and contributes \$8.25 billion annually to the economy according to the Maryland Manual On-Line. To ensure that our working lands will continue to operate far into the future, conservation is key.

As a result of conservation programs funded by the real estate transfer tax, we have made great progress on land conservation statewide and have conserved over 1,800,000 acres statewide. Yet, development remains a threat to our working lands, forests and open space. Setting a statewide conservation goal of 30 percent by 2030 and 40 percent by 2040 will better guide our state’s conservation efforts over the course of the next two decades. This legislation outlines tools of how we are to accomplish this goal, including the creation of a revolving loan fund appropriated at \$10 million. This revolving loan fund enables conservation organizations to quickly access a large amount of capital they might not have and then protect parcels of land that might otherwise have been developed.

Although there have been significant investments in land conservation over the years, many communities still lack greenspace. This legislation establishes the Greenspace Equity Program which will provide funding to private land trusts and local governments to complete greenspace projects in underserved communities. Creating this fund will mitigate the negative effects caused to communities and local economies due to a lack of greenspace.

Passing the Maryland the Beautiful Act will ensure our working lands and open spaces will be preserved for the years to come and set our state as a leader in conservation.

If you have any questions, we are happy to provide support to members of the committee. Please reach out to ESLC's policy manager Sara Ramotnik at sramotnik@eslc.org.

We request a favorable report on SB 791 and thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SK Kline', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steven K. Kline
President
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy