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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 Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**The Honorable Jim Rosapepe**  
Vice Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee  
Maryland State Senate  
3 West Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Chesapeake Conservancy testimony for Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB 791 / HB 1031) – Favorable with amendments**

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

On behalf of Chesapeake Conservancy, I write to urge your support for the Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB 791 / HB 1031) sponsored by Senator Sarah Elfreth and Delegate Eric Luedtke and to support the Conservancy's requested amendments

Maryland's landscape varies from our mountainous west to the central piedmont to the eastern coastal plain. Within that diverse landscape, Maryland is home to significant and diverse habitats for birds, plants and wildlife. Our state's landscape has changed dramatically over the past century. Hundreds of thousands of acres of forestland serving as important habitat for wildlife have been developed.

This trend is playing out across the United States and globally, where today as many as 1 million species are threatened by extinction in the coming decades due to global climate change, habitat loss, pollution, and other human-caused factors. This nature crisis is happening in our backyards, too. In 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared that the Maryland darter fish – the only species known to be unique to Maryland – is extinct.

As Maryland continues to grow, we must ensure that space for nature and for Marylanders to enjoy and benefit from open space is a part of our future. SB 791 would achieve this by setting a goal for Maryland to have 30% of its lands conserved by 2030 and 40% by 2040. For two decades, Maryland has preserved hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural lands by following a goal set by the General Assembly in 2002 (Senate Joint Resolution 10 / House Joint Resolution 22).

Thanks to conservation programs funded through the real estate transfer tax, we have made significant progress on the agricultural land preservation goal and on land conservation statewide. Today, about 28% of Maryland's lands are protected, but we do not have a goal in statute to guide overall land conservation efforts today and over the next two decades. SB 791 would resolve this by setting a meaningful and achievable goal, but also by providing the tools to help achieve this goal and do so in an equitable manner.

Importantly, SB 791 would establish a new program called the “Greenspace Equity Program.” This program would provide grants to land trusts, local governments and non-profits to complete greenspace projects in underserved communities such as new parks, community gardens, trails and more. Despite considerable investments in land conservation over the past decades, many Maryland communities still lack greenspace and this has significant costs for public health, local economies, and community well-being. The Greenspace Equity Program would target grant investments to support community-led greenspace projects that meet the unique community needs for greenspace. In this way, we can help ensure that as Maryland pursues a 30% and 40% land conservation goal, it can do so in a way that is equitable and benefits underserved Maryland communities.

**Chesapeake Conservancy is requesting three amendments to this program, which are attached in the accompanying document.**

SB 791 would also help to advance progress toward its conservation goal by creating a revolving loan fund for private land trusts. Land trusts play an important role in protecting land across Maryland. These organizations – most often non-profits – are based in communities and serve to acquire and conserve land so that it remains forestland, farmland or open space in perpetuity. Very often, landowners will first contact their local land trust to explore a conservation option, making these organizations especially important in the effort to protect open space in Maryland.

SB 791 would establish a revolving loan fund to provide land trusts with another source to secure capital so that they can work with landowners and buy and conserve land. In today’s hyper competitive real estate market, landowners are pressured to act quickly. A revolving loan fund would allow private land trusts to better compete in the real estate market and to meet the interests of landowners seeking to conserve their property. As a result, land trusts would be able to continue to play an important role in protecting and stewarding land for the benefit of Marylanders across the state.

Lastly, SB 791 would increase funding for the existing Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund. Statewide, the majority of forestland in Maryland is privately owned. Forests provide numerous ecological benefits to Marylanders, like clean air and clean water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and more. Recognizing the important role that private forestland owners play in stewarding forests and the benefits to Maryland, the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund provides grant funding to private landowners to support their efforts to steward and manage forests.

By passing the Maryland the Beautiful Act, we can ensure that nature and people will continue to thrive in Maryland today and long into the future. Thank you for considering my testimony, and I urge your support for SB 791.

Sincerely,



Joel Dunn  
President and CEO  
Chesapeake Conservancy

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)”**