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Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 9, 2022

**Testimony in Favor of SB791
Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs
(Maryland the Beautiful Act)**

Chairman Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, & members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 791, legislation to set Maryland on a path to conserve 30% State land by 2030 and 40% of State land by 2040 by, in part, establishing various programs to ensure that we can effectively reach these critical land preservation goals.

Within months of taking office, the Biden Administration implemented the “America the Beautiful” initiative to preserve 30% of our nation’s land by 2030 (30 x 30). Since the enactment of that initiative, other States (California, Nevada, Hawaii, South Carolina, New York, Maine, and Michigan) have introduced legislation or made commitments to reach 30 x 30. This legislation will take Maryland further by also setting a 40 x 40 goal as well.

The good news is that Maryland is well on its way to reaching the 30 x 30 goal with roughly 28% of our State lands already preserved – in large part due to the actions taken by this body to create renowned conservation programs such as Program Open Space and the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF). This legislation will enact additional, targeted funding sources to support conservation efforts.

In order to provide the funding necessary to meet the 30x30 and 40x40 goals, this legislation will:

1. Create a \$10M Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Program to provide financial support to land trusts to help facilitate the purchase and conservation of property throughout the State.
2. Increase funding to the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund from \$50,000 to \$1M to expand on the important work the Mel Noland Fund supports in the stewardship of our forestland.

SB791 will empower the Smart Growth Subcabinet to oversee reaching 30x30 and 40x40 by requiring the Subcabinet to:

1. Coordinate with different levels of government and NGOs;
2. Develop and publish a plan that meets the goals outlined in the bill and require updates as needed;
3. Submit additional reports to the appropriate Committees on the State’s progress in reaching the goals in the bill.

This legislation will also ensure greater equity in land conserved and open to more Marylanders efforts by:

1. Creating the Greenspace Equity Fund, with a \$3M appropriation in FY24 and \$5M each year thereafter.
2. Authorize the fund to be used to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspaces in overburdened areas of the State, using the lens established in last year’s Tree Solutions Now Act, such as community gardens, urban farms, and trails.

Once again I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 791 to ensure that Maryland remains a nationwide leader in conservation efforts and provides the necessary financial support to conserve additional lands.