



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 791

Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs
(Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Date: March 9, 2022

To: Budget & Taxation Committee

Position: Support

From: Erik Fisher, AICP, MD Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 791, which would bolster coordination and investment in land conservation across Maryland to help achieve community and clean water goals. If adopted, this bill will provide key tools and focus to increase the pace and equity of land conservation through revolving gap funding, coordinated planning, and dedicated investment in underserved communities.

Conserving land protects clean water and improves the health and well-being of Maryland residents.

Maryland's forests and farmlands are natural filters for our waterways that provide clean drinking water, seafood, recreation, and tourism. Forests soak up polluted runoff and capture excess nitrogen from the air before it can reach local rivers and streams. Agricultural operations that improve soil quality, raise pastured meat, or grow crops like hay can drive down pollution loads while supplying healthy, nutritious food. These benefits are magnified when land is protected, as habitats are allowed to mature into high-functioning environmental features and landowners have access to capital that can further improve their land.

Action is needed to keep pace with Maryland's conservation commitments.

Maryland is the fifth most densely populated state in the nation, and its population continues to increase. Under the interstate Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, Maryland has committed to help restore 235,000 acres of wetlands and protect more than 2 million acres of high-value forest and farmland by 2025. This goal has not yet been achieved. Looking ahead, the state will need to set even more robust targets to ensure that land conservation keeps pace with land development.

SB 791 fills persistent and inequitable gaps in Maryland's land conservation strategy.

- Investments in underserved communities are sorely needed to correct persistent imbalances in conservation spending and help stop the flooding and contamination often borne by communities in highly-developed local watersheds.
- The bill's threshold goals affirm Maryland's promise to keep the pace of land conservation in step with development pressure.
- The 5-year plan will improve the efficiency of existing preservation programs, including Program Open Space, MALPF, Rural Legacy, investments by local governments and dozens of regional land trusts.
- Revolving gap funding will make local land trusts nimbler and more responsive for landowners, increasing the pace and quality of lands conserved.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 791. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.