



# PRESERVATION MARYLAND

March 9, 2022

RE: SB791 – Maryland the Beautiful Act

Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I would like to offer our support of SB791, and our belief in the value of protecting open space and forests statewide.

Through our Smart Growth Maryland program, Preservation Maryland advocates for a more environmentally and economically sustainable future that creates opportunities for all Marylanders through better development patterns.

Support for the Maryland the Beautiful Act

Preservation Maryland supports SB791, which establishes a goal to protect Maryland's open space, works to make greenspace more equitable, empowers land conservation efforts, and seeks to improve the health of our state's forests.

SB791 would establish a land conservation goal for Maryland to protect 30% of its lands by 2030 (30x30) and 40% by 2040 (40x40). These goals are essential to making sure that open space and all its benefits are a part of Maryland's future for all Marylanders. Setting the goals is only the first step, and this legislation takes steps to ensure those goals are achieved by directing the Smart Growth Subcabinet and the Department of Natural Resources to work together to track the 30 x30 and 40x40 goals.

Importantly, SB791 also takes steps to guarantee that land conservation is more equitable by creating the "Greenspace Equity Program," which would provide a new source of grant funding to complete greenspace projects in underserved communities. This grant funding would support community-led projects including land acquisition, park development, community gardens, and greenspace stewardship.

Protecting our forests and setting a land conservation target that is meaningful and achievable are integral parts of our climate solution strategy. Forests in Maryland offset about 15% of gross emissions in our state, and when managed with conservation practices, farmland can also sequester a substantial amount of carbon. The Maryland the Beautiful Act would increase funding and set mandatory appropriations for the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Program to support stewardship efforts of private forest landowners and would establish a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to provide bridge loans to help land trusts work more quickly and enable conservation to keep pace with development.

Over the last few years, where many people have felt isolated by the distancing measures needed to stay safe during an international pandemic, many turned to the natural world for support. Indeed, we have truly seen the value of open space during the weeks under quarantine and social distancing. With many sources of entertainment like movie theatres and museums closed, Marylanders overwhelmingly sought out open space and parks as essential destinations. Setting the land conservation goals in this legislation would be an important step in protecting those resources that have proven to be so important to the well-being and health, both physical and mental, of Marylanders.

**We respectfully request a favorable report on SB791 and thank you for your consideration.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elly Colmers Cowan".

Elly Colmers Cowan  
Director of Government Relations