



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB541– The Great Maryland Outdoors Act

February 16, 2022

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB541** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with over 2000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland’s Eastern Shore is defined by its “open space” and rural character, but how many of these open spaces are meant for the general public? Equitable public access to the natural resources of our state is critical for a person’s mental and physical health, and promotes a natural sense of stewardship; you will not protect what you do not love, and you cannot love what you do not know.

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will increase the infrastructure funding available to public parks, and prioritize connectivity to local communities in an equitable manner so that there are more public spaces available for all Marylanders to enjoy. Key actions of this SB541 include: Establish a Parks and Recreation Commission to address capacity and accessibility of existing parks; establish a Sustainable Forestry Council for the State; create 100 new green jobs within the parks service, establish a new non lapsing fund for park related capital improvements and land acquisition; and bolster funding for the Maryland Rural Legacy Program and the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Fund.

As Chester Riverkeeper, I work with counties and towns within my watershed to improve and expand public open spaces for all communities. Parks have the ability to connect more residents with our waterways, as well as provide opportunities for reforestation or increased tree canopy, both of which are valuable green infrastructure practices that improve water quality. Increased funding and staff resources for park maintenance, capacity, infrastructure, connectivity, and equity will help organizations like ShoreRivers achieve local public access goals, connect residents to nature, and foster community stewardship to improve water quality on the Eastern Shore.

For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB541**.

Sincerely,

Annie Richards

Chester Riverkeeper, on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

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