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Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB0086 - Department of Natural Resources – Lease Agreements – Trail Access Provision

January 25th, 2021

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 0086, which will require tenants that lease property from the Department of Natural Resources to maintain unobstructed access to trails. As many of you know, our state parks system has seen a significant jump in use during the COVID-19 pandemic - however, current DNR land tenants are not required to allow access to public trails that cross their leased property. Across the state, tenants have placed fences, barbed wire, and even abandoned rusted machinery on trailheads. These actions are in direct conflict with the fundamental principles of the parks system's mission statement: to encourage the use and enjoyment of nature by Marylanders.

Specifically, the difficulty accessing public trails that cross leased property presents a major health and safety issue: bikers, horseback riders, or joggers may be discouraged from utilizing trails that should be available to them, and may injure themselves trying to get around current obstructions. In this situation, the obstructions may also prevent first responders from reaching trail users who require immediate medical attention. Luckily there is a simple, common sense solution: SB86 will require that a single clause be added to DNR leases such that tenants must leave an unobstructed border around trailheads on their property. This will ensure that trail users and first responders can utilize the trails as the state intends. It will also require the Department to submit a report of all executed leases to DGS to verify that the clause has been included.

Hiking and other activities allowed by the trail system allow a healthy and affordable form of recreation that should be accessible to all – but you have to be able to get there! To best ensure the accessibility and safety of trails in Maryland, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 0086.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Katie Fry Hester".

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Carroll and Howard Counties