



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 727

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations
(Great Maryland Outdoors Act)

Date: February 23, 2022

Position: Support

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

From: Erik Fisher, AICP, Maryland Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 727, which addresses serious funding shortfalls for supporting and preserving Maryland's parklands, farms, forests, and open space. These investments will help current and future generations of Marylanders realize a myriad of health and environmental benefits from Maryland's outdoor resources.

Parks and open space are critical to restoring the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's natural treasure.

The forests, pastures, meadows, and marshes that stretch across the state's open spaces are our most effective natural filters, stopping pollution from fouling rivers, creeks, and the Chesapeake Bay. This natural footprint is essential to protect clean water: each acre of hardened surfaces like rooftops and parking lots is four times more polluting than meadow, and ten times more polluting than forest. Protecting and managing natural lands with park districts and conservation easements allow these landscapes to mature into high-functioning environmental features, provide sites to install pollution-reducing best management practices, and enhance wildlife habitat. For these reasons, 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. Unfortunately, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that preservation goals for open space and working lands have not yet been achieved.

The State's natural resources promote Marylanders' health and productivity.

Access to nature directly improves a person's wellbeing. Numerous studies show that contact with the natural world reduces negative health markers, increases creativity, relieves stress, and promotes a more active lifestyle. Open space also provides the opportunity to forage, fish, and develop a nutritious local food system through regenerative agriculture. Nevertheless, the Chesapeake Bay Program reports that Maryland has fallen behind Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania in the expansion of public access to natural areas and waterways.

HB 727 invests so that generations of Marylanders can enjoy the benefits of the state's natural spaces.

Maryland is the fifth most densely populated state in the nation, and its population continues to increase. Accordingly, state park capital assets are under tremendous strain with record numbers of visitors, while some of Maryland's best remaining natural areas fall to pressure from land development. The investments directed by HB 727 will help clarify and address the backlog of repairs, upgrades, and expansions to these facilities in a manner that recognizes the sensitive natural features and ecological carrying capacity of each tract. This funding will also boost efforts to protect more working farms and forest land.

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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 HB 727. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.