Members of the General Assembly:

I would like to voice my support in favor of House Bill 876 (HB876), an act concerning the Maryland Forestry Education Fund. With the passing of the Urban Trees Program (HB 991), called for by the Maryland General Assembly as a component of a 5,000,000-tree goal by 2031, I believe that a concerted effort needs to be made to increase the capacity of education and outreach programs for the Maryland Forestry Education Fund.

Urban forests are a combination of both the natural resources (trees, greenspaces) and the socio-political conditions of a city. Historic policies of racial and spatial segregation resulted in inequities which have enduring effects on the ways cities function socially, economically, and ecologically. These systemic forces have mechanisms linked to urban forest distribution, as evidence shows that low income and minority residents often live-in areas with disproportionately low tree canopy cover. The legacy impacts of these policies influence the values and meanings racially diverse people attribute to trees. Oftentimes, people of color are resistant to tree planting programs, citing concerns about long-term management of city trees to avoid the negative financial, safety, and aesthetic consequences for their neighborhood and properties.

To support the expansion of urban trees in these historically disadvantaged communities, urban forestry must be founded on policies that promote inclusion and integrate education to increase the value assigned to trees. By understanding the importance that diverse peoples attach to urban forests, we can clarify perspectives and priorities to make it easier to direct urban forest management. Furthermore, through education practitioners can move closer to the public at large and communicate values, include residents in decision-making, and to identify and achieve shared goals.