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February 23, 2022

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Chesapeake Conservancy, I write to urge your support for HB 784, a bill that would establish the Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program within the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Maryland's landscape varies from our mountainous west to the central piedmont to the eastern coastal plain. Within that diverse landscape, Maryland is home to significant and diverse habitats for birds, plants and wildlife. Our state's landscape has changed dramatically over the past century. Hundreds of thousands of acres of forestland serving as important habitat for wildlife have been developed.

This trend is playing out across the United States and globally, where today as many as 1 million species are threatened by extinction in the coming decades due to global climate change, habitat loss, pollution, and other human-caused factors. In 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared that the Maryland darter fish – the only species known to be unique to Maryland – is extinct.

HB 784 would directly address this nature crisis by designating irreplaceable natural areas within state-owned lands that support critical and threatened wildlife habitat. Such a designation would help to identify and preserve Maryland's biodiversity. These areas do not currently have the appropriate designation and protection needed to properly identify and protect habitat, and this bill would resolve this important gap in protection.

Thank you for considering this legislation, and I urge your support for HB 784.

Sincerely,



Joel Dunn
President and CEO
Chesapeake Conservancy