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The Maryland House of Delegates
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**Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of
HB0784 - The Irreplaceable Natural Areas Bill**

Chairman Barve and Fellow Committee Members,

This legislation would establish the Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program. It is another step forward in protecting the critical **HABITAT** of Maryland's rarest species, but **only** on public lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources.

Around the world, 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades. This extinction is not only happening in tropical rainforests but is happening in Maryland. For example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the final stages of review to declare the Maryland Darter extinct. The darter—a fresh-water, ray-finned fish—is the only vertebrate animal unique to Maryland. Failing to protect the unique habitats of endangered species will result in further biodiversity loss and extinction of the species vital to our ecosystem.

That is why House Bill 784 focuses on the protection of the habitat of a species. DNR currently has regulatory authority to protect threatened and endangered *species* but not their *habitats*.

This bill would protect what are called irreplaceable natural areas – the last few biologically unique places where threatened and endangered species still survive. Once these areas are lost, we can never replace them.

The bill requires DNR to designate these areas by mid-2023, including maps of each, unique features and threats to each, and compatible uses. DNR has already documented the general locations of these rare species, shown on their Bio-Net GIS Maps.

House Bill 784 will give the Department of Natural Resources a much-needed regulatory tool to protect irreplaceable natural areas which, once lost, are lost forever.

I request a favorable report on this legislation.