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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Delegate Dana Stein Testimony in Support of HB 876
Maryland Forestry Education Fund – Establishment

Chairman Barve and Fellow Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

Last year, the Maryland General Assembly passed a bill to plant 5 million trees over 8 years. For several years in a row, we've heard testimony on issues related to the Forest Conservation Act—designed to protect forest acreage in the state. We've also learned in the past few years how important forests—especially old-growth forests—are to carbon sequestration—the removal of carbon from our atmosphere to be stored in the earth.

As members of ENT, we know a lot about the importance of forests to the state. But, what about the average citizen of Maryland—particularly the millions of residents in urban areas of the state?

Twenty years ago, the Forest Service within the Department of Natural Resources had an education program that conducted seminars, school programs, and other educational outreach programs that taught that forests were really about more than just trees. That program was eliminated when the agency was downsized from over 130 to about 70 staff. The Maryland Forest Service still does not have enough staff to conduct outreach and education about our forests.

The purpose of HB 876 is to build the capacity of existing tools, such as the Maryland Forestry Foundation (an independent 501c3) and district forestry boards, which were created as a means of outreach to forest landowners. This bill would create a Maryland Forest Education Fund that would provide education and resources to Maryland's forest landowners and local governments for specific purposes, such as healthy forest management, climate science, forest conservation, urban forestry, and other related purposes listed in the bill.

Maryland has long recognized the need to educate residents on the important role agriculture plays in the state by funding the Maryland Agricultural Foundation in 1989 authorizing the creation and sale of Agricultural license plates in 200. Just as the purpose of the AG Foundation is to educate citizens about the important role agriculture plays in the state, the Maryland Forestry Foundation, through this fund, would do the same for our forests.

I urge you to support HB 876.

