



March 8, 2022

SB0783/HB0596 - Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights  
Beth Miller for the Green Towson Alliance  
Favorable

Dear Chair Smith, Jr. and Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, Chair Pinsky and Vice-Chair Kagan and Honorable Members of the Committees

The Green Towson Alliance (GTA) writes in support of SB0783/HB0596 Maryland Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Human Rights. We believe it is vital to guarantee each person in the State of Maryland the right to a healthful environment including clean air, water, land and a stable climate. We believe the State has a constitutional duty act as trustees of the environment for the public interest.

Too often communities of color and low-income neighborhoods bear the burden of environmental pollution and degradation. Our organization has seen this play out in Towson, Maryland where competing obligations to provide affordable housing are being used to justify the waiving of forest buffers and building setbacks. High priority forest conservation areas such as stream and wetland buffers, steep slopes and specimen trees are being cleared to make way for an affordable housing development in a historic African American Community, founded by freed slaves. This same community has suffered repeated environmental degradation from transportation and power infrastructure projects over the past 150 years.

Too often environmental laws are waived in Baltimore County. In a July 2019 survey of variances on the County website, GTA found that Countywide, of the 424 environmental variance applications listed, 354 were approved, 63 were pending, 6 were withdrawn and only 1 was denied. This amounts to an automatic awarding of variances to the benefit of developers and to the detriment of the environment.

We need the rights of Marylanders to live in a healthful environment to be enforceable and prioritized at all levels of government. Further, SB0783/HB059 Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Human Rights will provide a compelling legal impetus to strengthen environmental legislation. We urge the committee to give a favorable report on this bill and protect a healthy environment for our youth and future generations.

Best,

Elizabeth Miller  
*for the Green Towson Alliance*