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Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Pensions

Chair, Public Safety,
Transportation, and Environment

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area

Chair, Joint Subcommittee on
Program Open Space/Agricultural
Land Preservation

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 23, 2023

Testimony in Favor of SB470
Natural Resources – Land Conservation – Establishment of Goals and Programs
(Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Chairman Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, & members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 470 to provide the necessary programs and resources for Maryland to conserve 30% of State land by 2030 (30 x 30) and 40% of State land by 2040 (40 x 40).

Considering the current threats to wildlife habitats and the frequent emission of greenhouse gasses, Maryland should waste no time in stepping up our conservation efforts. According to the United Nations, humans have “significantly altered” three-fourths of the Earth’s land, threatening one million plants and animals and causing between 150 and 170 species to become extinct per day. Likewise, the burning of fossil fuels is polluting our air and increasing the risk of climate change, making the conservation of greenhouse gas absorbing plants essential. As a defense against these threats, the preservation of land and green infrastructure will be our first line of defense in mitigating the impacts of more severe storms and rising temperatures.

The dangers that our environment is currently facing has prompted leaders across the world to call for conservation of 50% of the Earth’s landmass. In the early months of his presidency, the Biden Administration enacted the “America the Beautiful” initiative, a proposal to preserve and restore 30% of the country’s land and water by the year 2030.

With programs like the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) and Program Open Space, Maryland has been able to preserve 23% of its land and water and 28.7%

of its land and critical habitats. We should build on our current progress by providing tools, strategy, and resources to protect Maryland habitats from further degradation.

In order to support the process of reaching our 30 x 30 and 40 x 40 goals, this legislation:

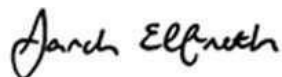
1. Sets in law that it is the intent of the General Assembly to conserve 30% of our lands by 2030 and 40% by 2040.
2. Creates a \$10 million Land Trust Rapid Response Revolving Loan Fund Program to expedite the process of securing land for smaller and medium-sized trusts that is operated by the Maryland Environmental Trust.
3. Creates an advisory committee to make recommendations on the use of the loan fund.
4. Empowers the Smart Growth Subcabinet to coordinate actions of governments and nongovernmental partners to meet our conservation goals – but also develop a plan by 2024 on how we are going to meet the goals outlined in the bill, and submit annual reports to the General Assembly on our progress.

To support the nonprofit actors that will help us reach our conservation goals, this legislation will:

1. Create the 40 x 40 Land Conservation Grant Program to provide support to organizations dedicated to implementation of the conservation goals established by the Bill – and that provide support and education opportunities to our conservation community.
2. Create citizen stewardship grants to be awarded to nonprofits, community organizations, schools, and municipalities to expand environmental education and stewardship opportunities.
3. Create small but meaningful grants to be awarded to land trusts to support further stewardship and technology support for their critical monitoring efforts.

With the funding opportunities, goals, and strategy created by SB470, this legislation will establish Maryland as a nation-wide leader in further conservation of our State's lands. Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 470 to provide the necessary funding and expertise to conserve these critical state lands.

Sincerely,



Sarah Elfreth