



Maryland General Assembly – Senate Budget & Taxation Committee – February 28, 2023

## **Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act) – SB 470**

### TESTIMONY OF DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND – **SUPPORT**

I am a professional ecologist who has served on the boards of Maryland Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Safe Skies Maryland, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Howard County Conservancy. I am speaking on behalf of the Howard County Conservancy, a nonprofit land trust that has been preserving land in Howard County since 1990 (howardnature.org).

#### **The Science is Clear**

Earth's foundational, billion-year-old environmental support system cannot be replaced. **Once species are gone, they are gone forever.** Today, as many as 1 million species of an estimated total 8 million species that exist on planet earth are threatened with extinction. Of all the plants and animals with whom we share the planet, only we have the power to choose the path our collective futures will take.

Over the past 50 years, more than 1 million acres of forestland and farmland in Maryland have been developed, imperiling native species, ecosystem services, and the economy and recreation that relies on our cherished lands. In May 2022, the Biden administration issued Conserving and Restoring *America the Beautiful*, detailing steps that the United States should take, working with State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments, agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, and other key stakeholders to achieve the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. **Maryland should do the same to provide adequate space for nature and bolster our state's strategy to mitigate the impacts of climate change.**

#### **This is the Right Bill:**

The *Maryland the Beautiful* Act responds to this nature crisis by setting a statewide conservation goal and providing the tools to advance conservation progress and ensure that all Maryland communities can benefit:

- **Establishing a goal to protect open space** – through Smart Growth Subcabinet
- **Making greenspace more equitable** – through Greenspace Equity Program
- **Empowering conservation efforts** – through Revolving Loan Fund
- **Improving the health of forestland** – through Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Program
- **Contributing to climate resiliency** – by offsetting greenhouse gas emissions

**The Howard County Conservancy is a Case Study in What Can Be Accomplished:**

Acting as a land trust since 1990, the Conservancy:

- Will reach the milestone of 2,000 acres preserved in Howard County through our easement programs
- These conservation easements provide preservation options for private property owners, providing important tax incentives to individuals
- Through a new grant funded program, we are now able to purchase conservation easements from nonprofits like churches, who otherwise would not benefit from the tax benefits of a donated easement
- Our easements come with long-term stewardship responsibilities for our organization and this legislation will assist the many land trusts like the Conservancy to ensure the health of these important ecosystems.

**Maryland has the chance to do our part to conserve nature and reap its economic, climate, and quality-of-life benefits for the generations to come.**

We respectfully ask for your favorable report on SB 470.

Thank you on behalf of the Howard County Conservancy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Southerland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mark Southerland, PhD  
Board of Trustees  
Howard County Conservancy  
10520 Old Frederick Road  
Woodstock, MD 21163