



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

March 30, 2023

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 923 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department administers Program Open Space Local, the Community Parks and Playgrounds Program, and the Baltimore City Direct Grant Program which provide grants to local governments for open space and recreation projects including projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace in overburdened and underserved communities. SB 923 establishes the Greenspace Equity Program which would provide grants to a county or municipality, or land trust or nongovernmental organization located or working in an overburdened or underserved community.

The Department continues to work with local governments to address park equity statewide. The Greenspace Equity Program would be another tool to accomplish this. The Department is supportive of the goals of SB 923 and would recommend amendments consistent with the third reader of HB 503 to ensure the Department can administer the program efficiently and effectively, and that the greenspace acquired or developed with a grant through this program will remain publicly accessible. Additional staff will be needed to administer the program.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department administers several land preservation and recreation programs primarily funded with transfer tax revenue. The Greenspace Equity Program is to be funded from the state share of Program Open Space which also funds the Rural Legacy Program, the Heritage Areas Authority, the Baltimore City Direct Grant, DNR’s Capital Development Programs (Critical Maintenance, the Natural Resources Development Fund, POS Public Access), and the Ocean City Beach Replenishment Program. The remaining funds are appropriated to Program Open Space Stateside to preserve natural areas for public recreation and watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through fee simple and conservation easement acquisitions. Transfer tax revenues can fluctuate greatly and if they decrease, there may not be sufficient funding for all the programs listed above.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 923 establishes a new Greenspace Equity Program administered by the Department to provide grants to eligible applicants to implement projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace.

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