



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

March 30, 2023

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 503 – Third Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

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. HB 503 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 HB 503 as amended. HB 503 as amended ensures that greenspace acquired or developed with a grant through this program will remain publicly accessible and clarifies certain provisions to allow the Department to administer the program efficiently and effectively. 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. HB 503 as amended authorizes funding up to a certain amount, which provides the flexibility necessary to provide funds to all the programs listed above should they decrease.

BILL EXPLANATION

HB 503 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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