

WKC HB503 FAVORABLE Greenspace Equity Program Test

Uploaded by: Alexander Villazon

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 11075
Takoma Park, MD 20913-1075
info@waterkeeperschesapeake.org
https://waterkeeperschesapeake.org
(800) 995-6755

March 30, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of **HB0503** on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable, and on behalf of our Fair Farms Initiative. We support the establishment of the Greenspace Equity Program and the funding for the creation and preservation of green spaces to overburdened and underserved communities that lack access to them. Green spaces in communities are an effective method for improving the health and well-being of residents, particularly in older urban neighborhoods. Historically, segregation and redlining of predominantly Black and low-income neighborhoods impeded the planning of green spaces such as community parks and street trees. In a 2018 report by the USDA and US Forest Service, access to greenspaces and forests was found to reduce pollution, increase active lifestyles, improve mental health, reduce stress, and build social and equitable communities.

The Greenspace Equity Program established by **HB0503** would allow for new green space projects to take place on previously abandoned sites, opening opportunities to build community gardens, open space areas, parks, trails, and urban farms. Eligible grant recipients include community land trusts, local NGOs, and county and municipal governments. The funding provided by the Greenspace Equity Program would enable community leaders and members to access the necessary resources to guide how land parcels within their neighborhoods are used in order to better meet residents' needs.

For these reasons stated above, we urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB0503**.

Sincerely,

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and partnering farmers signed below:

Doug Adams
New Brooklyn Farms
Mt. Rainer, MD

Ibrafall (Bryan) Wright
Strength to Love 2 Farm
Baltimore, MD

HB 503 -FAV - MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: FAV



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 30, 2023

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill: HB 503 – Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Position: Support

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports HB 503, which creates a Greenspace Equity Program within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). MML applauds the bill's goal of enhancing public health and livability in overburdened and underserved communities through the creation and protection of outdoor spaces, and we appreciate that local governments are eligible grant recipients. Our towns and cities recognize the value of greenspaces and the role they can play in our residents' physical and mental health, but we often don't have sufficient resources to make greenspaces more available and accessible. We've seen similar programs succeed on a local level and we look forward to this expand option for supporting our residents.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests that this committee provide HB 503 with a favorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns	Chief Executive Officer
Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.	Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs
Bill Jorch	Director, Public Policy
Justin Fiore	Manager, Government Relations

1212 West Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-268-5514 | 800-492-7121 | FAX: 410-268-7004 | www.mdmunicipal.org

HB 503 Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Progr

Uploaded by: Cait Kerr

Position: FAV

Thursday, March 30, 2023

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; Guy Guzzone, Chair of the Budget & Tax Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

POSITION: Support HB 503 - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 503 offered by Delegate Stein. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

TNC is part of a global effort to preserve the world's remaining wild and near-natural habitats, with the goal of protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030. HB 503 advances that goal, while prioritizing equity by helping under-funded urban land trusts, community-based nongovernmental organizations, and county and municipal governments to preserve, maintain, and create greenspaces within high-density geographies.

HB 503 seeks to establish a new grant program, the Greenspace Equity Program, which will directly support projects to steward greenspaces in communities across Maryland that have historically been denied investment in and access to these spaces. This grant program will invest in land acquisition, maintenance, and greenspace development projects. It will support a variety of greenspaces, including community gardens and urban farms, parks and trails, woodlands and green networks, and other open gathering spaces. Eligible grant recipients include community land trusts and county and municipal governments. Residents living in urban areas have frequently been sidelined in the decision-making process when it comes to lands in their own community. Abandoned properties have stood vacant for years due to cost barriers to repurposing the land. These grants would enable community leaders and members to access the necessary resources to guide how land parcels within their neighborhoods are used in order to better meet residents' needs.

Air pollutants harm pulmonary and cardiovascular health. Ultrafine sized particulate matter has the ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the circulation system. Nitrogen oxides are major precursors of ground level ozone, which triggers asthma attacks and increases childhood asthma cases. These dangerous health risks disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods. Greenspaces improve local air quality, which can reduce rates of respiratory illnesses. They also reduce the urban heat island effect, thereby decreasing cases of heat-related illnesses and deaths. These spaces provide mental health benefits as well, such as stress recovery and improved mental well-being. Gaining access to greenspaces can significantly benefit community members' physical and mental health and reduce healthcare costs.

Due to high acquisition costs, urban land trusts face financial burdens to conserving greenspace in areas with high population density. The Greenspace Equity Program grants would provide support for urban property acquisition and serve as an invaluable resource to communities for stewarding existing green spaces or creating

greenspace out of previously developed land. Likewise, since the program's funds are flexible and provided directly to local governments and land trusts, the Greenspace Equity Program would provide financial support and decision-making power that will enable communities to create spaces that will improve community health and connectivity.

TNC commends Delegate Stein for advancing legislation aimed at advancing urban residents' health, well-being, and influence while also establishing, maintaining, and protecting greenspaces.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 503.

Stein Senate Testimony HB 503.pdf

Uploaded by: Dana Stein

Position: FAV

DANA M. STEIN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Vice Chair
Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees
Chair, Environment
Natural Resources,
Agriculture and Open Space



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The Maryland House of Delegates
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of

HB 503 - Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Environment, Energy, and Education Committee:

I am pleased to sponsor this important legislation, which would work to increase greenspace, including parks, community gardens, urban farms, trail connections and other important greenspace types, in Maryland's underserved and overburdened communities.

Just like our schools, roads, local businesses and other community assets, greenspace is a vital community asset. While Maryland has been a leader in terms of land conservation and protecting places for people and nature, it hasn't been equitable in terms of which communities benefit and how state conservation dollars have been invested. Many Maryland communities were developed without greenspace. Entire communities and neighborhoods have no public outdoor spaces and often lack trees and parks.

This program works somewhat like Maryland's Rural Legacy program, which has conserved over one hundred thousand acres of rural land by providing state funding for proposed projects. Like that program, the Greenspace Equity Program would target state shares of Program Open Space funds to provide state grants to land trusts, local governments, and nonprofits for conservation projects to create new greenspaces in places like the City of Baltimore, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, as well as in southern and western Maryland and Maryland's Eastern Shore. Grants can be used for site development into greenspace, in addition to stewardship of existing greenspaces.

There would be many benefits to this program, primarily:

Public Health. Access to greenspaces has been shown to improve mental as well as physical health. An increasing number of public health studies over the past 25 years have documented various dimensions of the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of people spending time in outdoor spaces.

Think back to 2020 when the pandemic caused our parks and trails to be oversubscribed by residents who had mobility to access them. But many residents in overburdened and underserved communities often lack the mobility to visit these open spaces. We need to provide accessible greenspaces *within* these communities so they also can experience the same health benefits.

Fostering Community. Greenspaces provide residents with a sense of pride and opportunities for community gatherings, outdoor enjoyment, access to nature, and even to grow food. Greenspace can also boost local economies, as parks and community gardens often improve home values.

The grants from this program will be available for land trusts, local governments, and other nonprofits, and 50 percent of the program's annual appropriation is reserved for land conservation projects to ensure that the program is working to create new greenspaces in these communities.

The program's first appropriation will not be until in FY 2025, which gives the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and grant applicants a year to prepare. The funding is scaled up over three years and then stabilizes in the fourth year and thereafter. Funding in the first year will be \$5 million, then \$7 million in FY 2026, and \$10 million in FY 2027 and in each fiscal year thereafter.

The bill establishes criteria that DNR and an advisory board—also created by this legislation—would follow in evaluating annual grant applications. Two of these criteria are a strong showing of support by local residents and organizations, including businesses within the community, and the ability to demonstrate collaboration among land trusts, local governments and nonprofits.

The program created by this legislation will promote projects that create, preserve, and enhance community greenspaces for the many areas of our state that were built up before we understood the benefits of greenspace on public health.

I hope you will support this bill.

HB503-SB0923 - FAV - Nature Forward.pdf

Uploaded by: Denisse Guitarra

Position: FAV

March 29, 2023

Written testimony for SB923¹ - HB503² - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Position: Favorable

Submitted by: Denisse Guitarra, MD Conservation Advocate, Nature Forward

Dear Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) is the oldest independent environmental organization protecting nature in the DC metro region. Our mission is to inspire residents of the greater Washington, DC, region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education, and advocacy. We thank the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB923 (and HB503 as amended) - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment.

Nature Forward supports SB923/HB503 in particular because it would direct funding for acquisition and stewardship of green space to underserved communities with the greatest need, where the benefits would also be the greatest. This new grant program will directly support projects to protect and steward greenspaces in underserved and overburdened communities across Maryland. This new grant program is a statewide program, and there are communities across the state that would benefit.

This bill will support a variety of greenspace uses, including pocket parks, community gardens, urban farms, trail connections, woodlands, and other community greenspace areas. This would not only support projects to protect new greenspaces, but it would also support projects to help steward existing greenspaces. These are the exact areas where Nature Forward has worked with largely Latinx families in around the Long Branch stream valley park located in Silver Spring, MD. The community members have constantly expressed the need to see more

¹ SB923. Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/SB0923>

² HB503. Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/HB0503?ys=2023rs>





urban canopy and access to greenspaces as a need for health, wellbeing, and outdoor activities/recreation.³ Furthermore, the Long Branch community has expressed these same ideas to Montgomery Parks as they undergo their Long Branch Park Initiative which will renovate 9 parks along the Long Branch trail in the next few years.^{4,5} We work with other communities in Maryland who share many similar concerns.

Time in nature has especially significant impacts on children's physical and cognitive development. A 2018 report by the US Forest Service and US Department of Agriculture⁶ found that access to greenspaces and forests reduces pollution, increases active lifestyles, improves mental health, reduces stress, increases academic success in children, and builds social and equitable communities. Furthermore, Nature Based / Forest Schools⁷ are an increasing type of outdoor based learning and educational programs which allow children (and adults) to learn, take risks, and use nature as their playground and research lab. Nature Forward has seen the benefits in kids of all ages in creating outdoor based programs.⁸

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has recognized that access to green space is important for people at all stages of life—children, teens, adults, and seniors—and creates a sense of community and well-being. DNR has created an interactive Maryland park equity map which shows lower park equity in the underserved census tracts shown in the National Capital Region of Maryland.⁹ This map shows a correlation of the urgent need to fund and create more greenspace for underserved communities in Maryland, especially those near highly urbanized areas. These are the same areas Nature Forward has been working with majority Latinx community members via our watershed education programs in Long Branch, Langley Park, Riverdale Park, and Edmonston, MD.

³ Nature Forward - Long Branch community outreach. Available at: <https://natureforward.org/program/long-branch-community-outreach/>

⁴ Long Branch Parks Initiative. Montgomery Parks. 2023. Available at: <https://montgomeryparks.org/long-branch-parks-initiative/>

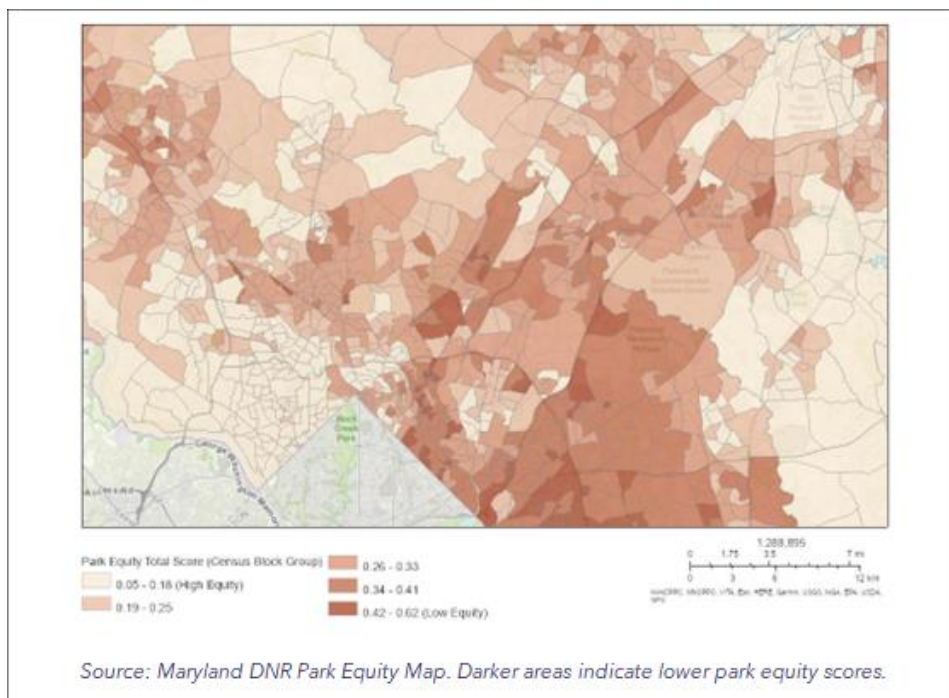
⁵ Long Branch - Garland Neighborhood Park Renovation. Montgomery Parks. 2021. Available at: <https://montgomeryparks.org/projects/directory/long-branch-garland-neighborhood-park-renovation/>

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2018. Urban nature for human health and well-being: a research summary for communicating the health benefits of urban trees and green space. FS-1096. Washington, DC. 24 p. Available at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/urbannatureforhumanhealthandwellbeing_508_01_30_18.pdf

⁷ Spencer-Milnes, Xenia. 2021. Forest School: What Is It and What Are the Benefits? Available at: <https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/what-is-a-forest-school/>

⁸ See all of Nature Forward's adult and children's programs at: <https://natureforward.org/programs/>

⁹ Maryland Department of Natural Resources Park Equity web page, <https://dnr.maryland.gov/pages/parkequity.aspx>.



In addition to local governments, eligible grant recipients could include small community land trusts and other nonprofit organizations, which currently have difficulty accessing funding to acquire land when it becomes available or to maintain existing green spaces SB923/HB503 provides for a Greenspace Advisory Board with representatives who are residents of underserved or overburdened communities and reflect Maryland's diversity, to encourage continuing community involvement and participation.

The passage of this bill would help ensure access to nature for Marylanders increase access and promote the health of their communities. Nature Forward and our 28,000 members and supporters recommend the passage of SB923/HB503.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra, Nature Forward Maryland Conservation Advocate
Anne DeNovo, Nature Forward Conservation Volunteer

HB0503-EEE_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



House Bill 503

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
and Budget and Taxation Committees

Date: March 30, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 503. This bill would redirect a segment of state-side Program Open Space (POS) funding to create the Greenspace Equity Program. This program would provide additional resources for counties and other stakeholders to promote equity through greenspaces within their overburdened and underserved communities.

Since POS was first implemented in 1969, the State of Maryland and its counties have been immensely successful in expanding access to public recreation and natural areas. The program has advanced numerous health and economic benefits to Marylanders. The Department of Natural Resources highlights that home values increase faster around parks and protected areas and new businesses prefer communities with healthy environments. Access to active and outdoor venues like these are a central element in our state's "quality of life" proposition.

POS is the critical pillar in how counties fund many of their recreation and preservation programs. Without the local side of POS many county parks departments would be unable to adequately function. HB 503's Greenspace Equity Program seeks to further local preservation and recreation efforts by preserving the local side of POS and allowing access to additional resources from the state share of POS. As the level of government closest to the people, county parks departments remain the best positioned to identify and work to preserve greenspace in the communities we all call home.

Counties fully support the intent of HB 503 and welcome the potential to expand collaborative efforts to reach all Marylanders with active and passive recreation opportunities. For this reason, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 503 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

HB0503_DNR_SUP_EEE_3-30-23.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: FAV



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.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
emilyh.wilson@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8426 (office) ♦ 443-223-1176 (cell)

FM - SB923 -Greenspace Equity - Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Josh Hastings

Position: FAV



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

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Rob Etgen
Ann H. Jones

Date: March 28, 2023
Bill Number: **SB 923 (and HB 503) - Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment**
Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Position: Support

Forever Maryland supports **SB 923 - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment** (and House Bill 503 as amended) for the purpose of providing grants to land trusts or counties and municipalities, to help enhance the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities across Maryland.

This bill is the result of years of reflection as to how and where to target conservation investments in order to improve the health of communities and the lands in which they inhabit. Through tools like the Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ Park Equity mapper, it has become much clearer as to where the state could focus conservation and greenspace investment. This bill delivers resources, to targeted areas, to do just that.

Up to 50% of available funds may be used for greenspace acquisition – a direct intended use of Program Open Space funding – and the other 50% is intended to improve and enhance greenspace within a given community. Beginning in FY 2025, the Department of Natural Resources would make available grants that can be utilized for various greenspace purposes, including: community gardens, community parks and woodlands, new trails, urban farms, or other open space uses. Grant amounts can be up to \$5 million in FY25, \$7 million in FY26, and up to \$10 million in FY27 and each year thereafter.

The Greenspace Equity Program will have the ability to advance public health, climate resilience, habitat improvements, and so much more, to communities across the entire state of Maryland. A successful grant will include evidence of support from the local government and the overburdened and/or underserved community in which the project would be located.

We respectfully request a favorable report on SB 923 and ask that it conform to HB 503 as amended and passed by the House of Delegates.

For further information, please contact the organization’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or Josh@ForeverMaryland.org.

FOREVER MARYLAND

2331 Rock Spring Road | Forest Hill, MD 21050 | 443-640-1034 | www.ForeverMaryland.org

Green Space Equity Bill Testimony Baltimore Green

Uploaded by: Katherine Lautar

Position: FAV



March 29, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Vice Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 503 / SB 923 – Greenspace Equity Program - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment,

On behalf of Baltimore Green Space, I urge you to support HB 503 / SB 923, the proposed “Greenspace Equity Program.”

While Program Open Space makes Maryland a national leader on land conservation and the protection of open space for the benefit of people and nature, this bill addresses an unintentional structural inequity in the Program Open Space funding and conservation funding available at the state level. This funding has historically been inaccessible to smaller land trusts serving towns and cities.

Program Open Space Local funding is distributed directly to county & city governments and Program Open Space Stateside requires a minimum acreage of 5 acres for a land trust to be eligible. Additionally, the Rural Legacy Program is available only to rural land trusts and municipalities for land acquisition. While the programs as they exist are powerful conservation tools to be celebrated, there is nothing comparable for urban areas or small towns where green lots available have a smaller acreage footprint, green spaces are in high demand, dwindling, and even more essential for local climate resilience.

Baltimore City alone currently has over 800 green spaces where neighbors tend abandoned lots creating green spaces for their communities. You can find a map of these spaces at the following [link through the Project Vital study](#) with the Bloomberg School of Public Health. These communities, though not all, are often in historically redlined areas. The same pattern repeats in many towns and cities across the state. Without more conservation, these spaces are vulnerable to development and increased vulnerability to worsening climate impacts for surrounding neighbors. For a list of local land trusts that would be able to make use of these funds to address equity issues in conservation follow this link https://dnr.maryland.gov/met/Documents/Land_Trust_Directory.pdf.

Few of the state conservation programs require defined equity measures to be met, have a community-related advisory committee, or require formal input from community leaders as to the need the conservation projects may serve. The Green Space Equity Program will



be the first conservation advisory board to require members of underserved communities to be part of the decision-making process. We believe this will deepen the goals of equitable implementation and expand understanding of unserved community needs in the conservation community.

We hope you will be a part of moving forward this important legislation to increase equity in Maryland's conservation efforts. We and the other experienced land trusts are eager to embody this legislation serving the community.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to the greater good through your legislative work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Lautar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "K".

Katherine Lautar,
Executive Director
Baltimore Green Space

HB0503 Written Testimony Lkb in senate 1.pdf

Uploaded by: Kenneth Phelps, Jr.

Position: FAV



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
OF MARYLAND

The Maryland Episcopal
Public Policy
Network

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 503
ALSO IN SUPPORT OF SB 923 IN CONFORMANCE
WITH HB 503**

**Environment and Energy – Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program -
Establishment
FAVORABLE**

**TO: Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair, Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair,
and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; and
Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair, Senator Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair, and members
of the Budget and Taxation Committee**

FROM: Rev. Linda K. Boyd, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

DATE: March 30, 2023

The Episcopal Church at large and the Diocese of Maryland in particular have embraced the concept of reparations, a concept not limited to financial considerations but to a leveling of the playing field across a broad spectrum of issues, including achieving equity in quality-of-life issues, such as quality of life. HB 503 will take important steps to rectify well-entrenched environmental policies that have resulted in unfairly and disproportionately affecting communities of color. Rectifying such inequities is long overdue. Equity with regard to the environment is sorely needed. Living in a healthy environment is essential for all and not just for wealthy people, who almost never have to address these issues. The systemic racism that has been caused by redlining and reinforced in multiple ways to destabilize and harm communities of color is the present painful backdrop of the beautiful healing green space neighbors create and care for. Each one of us is responsible for ensuring the success of programs to address these injustices.

Every person, as a matter of basic human dignity, has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and stable environment. Ensuring a process for overburdened and underserved communities to have the opportunity to enhance their Greenspace is essential to providing for the public health and livability we all deserve.

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report with regard to HB 503.

Greenspace Equity Sign on for EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Kristen Harbeson

Position: FAV



March 30, 2023

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Dear Chairman Feldman,

The undersigned organizations urge a favorable report on HB503. Establishing a “Greenspace Equity Program,” this legislation would provide annual state funding to land trusts, local governments and other community partners working in Maryland’s underserved and overburdened communities where the public need for greenspace is often greatest.

In 2022, the Maryland General assembly proposed the Maryland the Beautiful Act, which would have established land conservation goals, supported local land trusts, and created a greenspace equity program to ensure Maryland’s underserved communities retain access to nature. In 2023, however, the Greenspace Equity Program stands separately from Maryland the Beautiful as an opportunity to enhance environmental justice in Maryland’s most vulnerable cities.

Green spaces in cities are a simple and effective tool for improving the health and well-being of residents and the livability of older urban neighborhoods, many of which were designed without regard for greenspace access and have faced disinvestment, compounding environmental and health inequities. Proven health benefits from nature and green spaces include promoting an active lifestyle, abating air pollution, and reducing rates of anxiety and depression. Green spaces also help mitigate the heat island effect and reduce stormwater loads, enhancing resilience to climate change in urban neighborhoods.

While Maryland’s Rural Legacy Program has been made available to aid in conservation of lands in the rural areas of our state, because the program is specified for rural land, it excludes Maryland’s many urban and suburban communities. Often with a higher cost to acquire, urban land trusts face an added financial burden to conserving greenspace in areas of larger population density. In addition to supporting property acquisition, HB503’s grant program would be an invaluable resource to communities maintaining existing green spaces or creating greenspace out of previously developed land. Likewise, since HB503 funds are flexible and provided directly to counties, land trusts, and local NGOs, the Greenspace Equity Program would offer underserved and overburdened communities enhanced self-determination in a greener future.

We strongly urge a favorable report on this important bill.



Arundel Rivers Federation
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Blue Water Baltimore
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights
Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Maryland Public Health Association
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Nature Forward
NeighborSpace of Baltimore County
Prince George's County Audubon Society
ShoreRivers
Southern Maryland Audubon
The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
Waterkeepers Chesapeake



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
LEGISLATIVE MINISTRY
of Maryland



 Audubon | MID-ATLANTIC



HB0503 Greenspace Equity Program_Educ Energy Envir

Uploaded by: Laurie McGilvray

Position: FAV



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: HB0503 - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program –
Establishment
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 30, 2022

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB503. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB503. HB503 will establish a Greenspace Equity Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide grants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities, and establishes a Greenspace Equity Advisory Board in the DNR.

The MLC Climate Justice Wing supports policies that benefit overburdened and underserved communities, which have historically sustained disproportionate environmental harm. By definition, “overburdened communities” are in census tracts that are disproportionately affected by more environmental health indicators. “Underserved communities” are in census tracts with a higher number of low-income residents who are also nonwhite and have limited English-proficiency. HB503 builds on the Maryland the Beautiful Act of 2022 and enhances equity by providing an opportunity to maintain existing green spaces or create greenspace out of previously developed land in overburdened and underserved communities in Maryland.

Urban green spaces provide environmental benefits like reducing urban heat and attenuating air pollution and stormwater runoff, but they also have direct health benefits to the surrounding community. Recent studies have shown how enhanced immune function is linked to contact with nature. Urban green space can reduce stress and have a restorative effect on mental and social health, as well as providing spaces for physical activity and social interaction.

The Greenspace Equity Grant Program will provide resources for land acquisition, but also be an important resource to communities for maintaining existing green spaces or creating greenspace out of previously developed land. For these reasons, we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for HB503 in committee.

hb503- greenspace equity- EEE, B&T 3-30-2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Lee Hudson

Position: FAV



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony Prepared for the
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
and the
Budget and Taxation Committee
on
House Bill 503
March 30, 2023
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairmen and members of these Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify for care of the gifts of creation. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community in three judicatories across our State.

Our community began advocating for a safe, healthy, flourishing environment that can sustain life in “Caring for Creation” (*ELCA, 1993. A healthy environment is also a stated concern of our “Caring for Health,” 2003.*) Stewardship of natural gifts and processes, through conservation and preservation policies, is wise and just because it protects what is for the benefit of all things now living.

And “all things now living” illustrates the need to defend and conserve the web of life. Green spaces are habitat; they sequester carbon; they purify air and water of noise and other pollutants; they buffer the watershed. A built environment is no surrogate.

We support practicing preservation and conservation in the natural world for the sake of all things now living. “All creatures great and small” (to quote a popular hymn) require the Seventh Day blessing recorded in Genesis 2:3. Preserving natural blessings within a built environment is a proper public policy.

There are biological research projects being conducted within urban contexts. (*The National Zoo is currently sponsoring bird field research in Baltimore City; see nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/neighborhood-nestwatch and www.birdsofurbanbaltimore.org/bird-banding.*) Migratory birds, to cite an example, require greenspaces to successfully complete their seasonal, and obligatory journeys. Raptors such as cooper’s hawks, redtails, merlins, kestrels, and owls, and Baltimore’s famous peregrines, are re-hegemonizing habitat within dense development. And, of course, humans—who have nature in the designation “human nature”—require the space, the green, the nature and the benefits that derive from eco-context. The point of our witness being that human life is biologic with all other life.

So, good public policy in Maryland will conserve and preserve a flourishing nature wherever it occurs. **House Bill 503** requires existing funds be directed to a Greenspace Equity Program in contexts where nature has been overlooked, and its benefits compromised.

Our community already advocates environmental protection and remediation for those living within this bill’s definition of “Overburdened Communities.” We enthusiastically do so again by supporting **House Bill 503** and urging your favorable report.

Lee Hudson

Testimony in Favor of SB 923.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Wharton

Position: FAV

Testimony in Favor of SB 923 & HB 503

Dear Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I will be short because I know you have a lot on your plates. I am Leslie Wharton, a long-time Maryland resident, and a leader in the Maryland Chapter of Elders Climate Action. I and my Elders Climate Action colleagues strongly support passage of the Greenspace Equity Program, Bill SB 923 with adjustments to conform with HB 503. This bill is essential to preserving Maryland's ecology, by helping to fund greenspace projects like new pocket parks or community gardens in Maryland's underserved communities. I personally have the luxury of living in a greenspace and it makes all the difference for my physical health and mental well-being. All Maryland residents deserve the same.

Thank you,

Leslie Wharton
4978 Sentinel Drive #501
Bethesda, Maryland 20816

HB503_MDSierraClub_fav 30Mar23.pdf

Uploaded by: Lily Fountain

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committees: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: HB503 “Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 30, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB503 as amended and passed by the House, and we hope the Senate will pass SB923 in accordance with these amendments. This bill establishes the Greenspace Equity Advisory Board and the Greenspace Equity Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide grants to counties, municipalities, or land trust organizations to implement projects to preserve, create, or enhance community greenspace that aims to enhance the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities.

Beginning in fiscal year 2025, the DNR would begin to issue grants under this program. Funding for the Greenspace Equity Program would be taken from existing Program Open Space funds. Grant money could be used for land acquisition, appraisals, environmental assessments, site clearance or development and other due diligence expenses related to implementing a project. The program would receive up to \$5 million in the first year, up to \$7 million in the second year, and up to \$10 million in each year thereafter. The Maryland State Clearinghouse for Intergovernmental Assistance, subject to approval by the Board of Public Works, shall approve or deny proposed grants.

The Greenspace Advisory Board will serve as a consultant to the DNR in the implementation of the program and shall consist of one State Senator, one State Delegate, one representative each from a municipal and a county Department of Parks and Recreation, a representative from the Maryland Environmental Trust, a representative from a land trust working in an overburdened or underserved community and five residents of an overburdened or underserved community who reflect the diversity of the state.

Working with local communities, this grant program could be used to enhance, create or conserve urban and pocket parks, community gathering open space, interconnected greenspaces or corridors, community woodland and/or trails, community gardens, and urban farms.

Enhanced and protected greenspaces are indispensable to people’s health, prosperity, traditions, and enjoyment. They would enhance public health and livability by improving air quality, providing places to socialize, and trails to use for multimodal transportation or exercise. Urban community gardens also absorb more stormwater than vacant lots¹.

¹ <https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/urban-agriculture>

Although urban farms play an important part in feeding communities they are frequently thwarted by gentrification and unpredictable leases.² Additionally, the purchase of land in urban areas is often more expensive which is why the allocation of funds is needed.

This program is urgently needed to add greenspaces to urban areas where they may not have been adequately and equitably allotted. Many people depend on greenspaces in urban areas for health and recreation. We strongly urge a favorable report.

Lily Fountain & Carolyn Parsa
Natural Places Committee
Lily.Fountain@MDSierra.org
Carolyn.Parsa@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

² Worth, P. (2022, March 5). [Black-led urban farms are thriving—until they have to fight for their land.](#) *The Guardian*.

HB 503 CBF FAV B&T EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 503

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment

Date: March 30, 2023

Position: **Favorable**

To: Education, Energy, & The Environment Committee
Budget & Taxation Committee

From: Matt Stegman
Maryland Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 503 which establishes a “Greenspace Equity Program”. This legislation would permit annual state funding to land trusts, local governments and other community partners working in Maryland’s underserved and overburdened communities where the public need for greenspace is often greatest.

In addition to the health and well-being benefits green spaces confer on residents of older urban neighborhoods, nature and green spaces have proven environmental benefits. Green spaces aid in abating air pollution, mitigating heat desert effects, reduce stormwater loads, and can help communities be more resilient against the impacts of climate change.

Often with a higher cost to acquire, urban land trusts face an added financial burden to conserving greenspace in areas of larger population density. In addition to supporting property acquisition, HB503’s grant program would be an invaluable resource to communities maintaining existing green spaces or creating greenspace out of previously developed land. Additionally, HB 503 provides discretionary grant funding in a flexible way that offers underserved and overburdened communities enhanced self-determination in their greener future.

CBF urges the Committee’s FAVORABLE report on HB 503.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

HB0503-EEE-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB 503

March 30, 2023

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: HB-503 – Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 503.

The bill appropriates \$5, \$7 and \$10 million in 2025, 2026 and in 2027 (plus each following fiscal years), respectively to the Greenspace Equity Fund it establishes. Greenspace is defined to include community gardens, green networks, parks, trails, urban farms, woodlands, and open spaces, per the bill language. The Greenspace Equity Fund established would be to ‘...enhance the public the public health and livability of overburdened communities...’ protecting, creating and preserving community greenspace.

A board would also be established under this legislation to inform the allocation of the greenspace funds to overburdened communities. Board representation would include state, county and municipal representatives, plus members from overburdened communities.

The goals of this bill align well with strategies and actions outlined in Baltimore City's 2019 Sustainability Plan to:

- People & Nature – Strategy 1: Increase community connections to nature. Ensure it is done in culturally competent ways with early and frequent engagement.
- People & Nature – Strategy 3: Improve and grow our natural systems and support increased management of them by residents, communities, organizations, and city government.
- Nature for Nature's Sake – Strategy 1: Increase restoration, creation, and maintenance of habitat for native species on public and private land; ensure it is done in culturally competent ways with early and frequent engagement.
- Nature for Nature's Sake – Strategy 3: Increase the acreage of maintained and protected land.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report for HB 503.

HB 503 Rachel Toker Testimony.3.29.2023_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel Toker

Position: FAV



March 29, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Vice Chair, Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 503 / SB 923 – Greenspace Equity Program - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee,

Introduction

My name is Rachel Toker, and I respectfully submit this testimony on behalf of Urban Ecosystem Restorations (UER), a nonprofit urban land trust working in the down-county suburbs of Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, where I serve as the President & CEO. UER’s target region is the National Capital Region (or “DMV”), but UER has been most active in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in the past few years. I am also writing on behalf of myself, as a voting resident of Montgomery County, where I have lived for more than 20 years.

Support for HB503/SB923

I am voicing my strong support for, and I urge you to support, Senate Bill 923 (Greenspace Equity Program), as well as the companion bill, House Bill 503. We ask that the Senate conform Senate Bill 923 to House Bill 503 as amended and passed by the House of Delegates.

Urban Space Needs Greenspace

Research across all sectors – academia, industry, government, and nonprofit – is showing that high quality greenspace (particularly what UER calls [Eco-Functioning Space](#)) must expand in urban areas if these communities are to remain healthy and thrive into the future. Research is also showing that, as urban areas expand, our natural ecosystems need connected corridors of green infrastructure and habitat to run through these same urban regions in order to remain intact and functioning. See <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/why-connectivity-matters-to-wildlife-and-people>.

Access to “Nearby Nature” and Human Health

Increasing bodies of evidence are showing that people of all ages need to interact with, and connect to, nature to maintain healthy lifestyles. Numerous stakeholders, including government agencies, environmental nonprofits, landscape architects, educators, public and mental health advocates, and park advocates, have started to study and design programs that use repetitive and frequent human-nature connections to positively affect human health. Hansen et al. (2017) have collected research findings demonstrating nature’s therapeutic effects on: (1) immune system function, (2) cardiovascular system function, (2) respiratory system function, (4) depression and anxiety, and (5) mental relaxation, attentional, and related disorders (including ADHD) (citations below). We are also seeing evidence of the need for people to be near natural green spaces in order to adapt to negative effects of climate change, particularly to manage flooding and urban heat island effects. For example, tree canopy plays a major role in the dissolution or creation of urban heat islands. Trees can help with heat by providing shade and releasing moisture into the atmosphere. Increased tree planting and green space development are major drivers of heat resilience. **A new Montgomery County study shows how heat resilience and urban green space are not equitably distributed and how heat islands map to intensively developed and low-income urban areas.** <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/389babe7ce654fdd87701488ae72e8b6>.

Urban Nature and Ecosystem Health

Urban nature is also essential for our regional natural ecosystems to remain healthy. See, e.g., <https://hudson.dnr.cals.cornell.edu/conservation-planning/inventory-and-planning/connectivity-planning>. Without connected corridors of habitat and green infrastructure, our isolated parks cannot support our native and migratory species. We must enable large, protected natural areas to connect into integrated ecological frameworks in order to maintain biodiversity and critical mass of native flora and fauna – and this requires greenways through urban areas across the State.

A recent study shows that Maryland’s policies have not yet incorporated this crucial concept from science. It reveals substantial loss of greenspace and tree canopy in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties. See <https://agmr.umd.edu/technical-study-changes-forest-cover-and-tree-canopy-maryland>:

At regional and county scales, patterns of forest change vary widely, and some concerning trends continue. Counties in central Maryland with rapid development and population growth experienced greater rates of loss, especially loss associated with development. While forest levels as a whole are stabilizing, continued urbanization is fragmenting forests and encouraging spread of invasive species.

Greenspace Quality

It is extremely important to recognize that, while the amount of greenspace should be equitably distributed, the quality of that greenspace is as important. Paved open spaces or greenspaces that are bare patches of grass -- or worse, infested with invasive species – are not contributing to the overall health of the regional ecosystem and they are often not contributing to the health of the local community either. Often, invasive species can actually limit access to a greenspace – particularly when dense and thorny. Therefore, funding for restoration and maintenance of

greenspaces (which is very hard to come by) is fundamentally important, particularly for overburdened urban areas that have been neglected and often suffer such infestations.

Lack of Local Funding Support

As a land trust working with local communities to partner with nature for their own health and the health of our planet, I see firsthand the funding shortage for these efforts. There are few grant funding sources available to restore, protect, and maintain urban greenspaces – particularly for those that are co-created with these local communities and sit outside of the public parks system. Without grant funds targeted for these purposes (in addition to the limited funding available from stormwater management grants for nature-based solutions), we cannot scale up our efforts. We have lost so many opportunities to protect precious greenspace because of this lack of funding. In fact, UER is working with a landowner in Prince George’s County’s Riverdale Park to create a community nature play space for children in surrounding neighborhoods, but we cannot identify a source of seed funding that would enable us to leverage additional funds so that we can implement the simple design and maintain the space over time.

In fall of 2021, UER, together with a coalition of 17 other community groups working across Montgomery County, called upon the Montgomery County Council to develop targets in its new general plan to increase equitably distributed green infrastructure as a public priority across the County, and to do so in concert with the County’s Climate Action Plan. Yet, Montgomery County chose not to do so, and it continues to be conservative about committing to specific metrics by which it will increase green infrastructure and natural areas in its towns, cities, and urban unincorporated areas. We believe this is in part because of funding concerns. Prince George’s County also has not created robust plans with specific targets for expansion of natural green infrastructure (for purposes beyond stormwater management) across its urban areas either.

Closing

As we invest in the protection of greenspace statewide, we need to be sure that we are investing in all communities – especially urban and low-income areas. That’s why this bill is so important. The funding support potentially offered by this legislation would provide a major step forward for those of us “on the ground” who seek to increase these essential greenspaces in underserved areas -- in the communities that need it most. I urge you to issue a favorable report on this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Rachel Toker
President & CEO

Relevant Citations

- Haahtela, T., Alenius, H., Lehtimäki, J., Sinkkonen, A., Fyhrquist, N., Hyöty, H., Ruokolainen, L., & Mäkelä, M. J. (2021). Immunological resilience and biodiversity for prevention of allergic diseases and asthma. *Allergy*, 76(12), 3613–3626. <https://doi.org/10.1111/all.14895>
- Hansen, M. M., Jones, R., & Tocchini, K. (2017). Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing) and Nature Therapy: A State-of-the-Art Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(8), 851. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080851>
- Heat Exposure and Cardiovascular Health: A Summary for Health Departments. (n.d.). 32.
- *Improving Health and Wellness through Access to Nature*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2022, from <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/08/09/18/improving-health-and-wellness-through-access-to-nature>
- *IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions*. (2019, July 18). IUCN. <https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/iucn-global-standard-nature-based-solutions>
- *Outside Our Doors, The Nature Conservancy*. https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/Outside_Our_Doors_report.pdf

101 LOS HB 503 CSMC signed.pdf

Uploaded by: Randy Guy

Position: FAV

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
**COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY**



James R. Guy, President
Michael R. Alderson, Jr., Commissioner
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Scott R. Ostrow, Commissioner

HB 503

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

SUPPORT

March 24, 2023

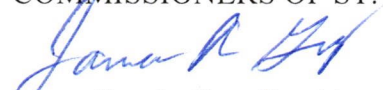
The Honorable Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 214013 East

Dear Chairman Feldman:

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County **SUPPORT HB 503**- Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment which is being heard in the Education, Energy and Environment Committee.

We support HB 503 and request a favorable report. We appreciate the introduction of this legislation and believe it will benefit the citizens of St. Mary's County. We look forward to working with you on this and other initiatives throughout the session.

Sincerely,
COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY


James Randy Guy, President

CSMC/AB/sf
T:/Consent/2023/101

Cc: Senator Jack Bailey
Delegate Matthew Morgan
Delegate Todd Morgan
Delegate Brian Crosby
Commissioner Mike Alderson, Jr.
Commissioner Eric Colvin
Commissioner Michael Hewitt
Commissioner Scott R. Ostrow
David Weiskopf, County Administrator
John Sterling Houser, Assistant County Attorney

Dunn to Chair Feldman Vice Chair Kagan re HB 503.p

Uploaded by: Reed Perry

Position: FAV

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www.chesapeakeconservancy.org | 443.321.3610

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Vice Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 503 / SB 923 – Greenspace Equity Program - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment,

On behalf of Chesapeake Conservancy, I would like offer our strong support for HB 503 / SB 923, the proposed “Greenspace Equity Program.”

Thanks to Program Open Space, Maryland is a national leader on land conservation and the protection of open space for the benefit of people and nature. However, many communities across the state, particularly those that are underserved or overburdened, lack sufficient greenspace. The lack of greenspace in communities has negative implications for public health, for local economies, and for community well-being.

Local governments, land trusts and non-profits have worked creatively, and often with very scarce resources, to meet this problem by acquiring and conserving land for pocket parks, urban farms, community gardens and other greenspaces. However, the current and future need for greenspace far exceeds the resources that these partners can deploy.

It's time for Maryland to increase its conservation investments in Maryland's underserved and overburdened communities, so that we can advance toward greenspace equity across the state. We support HB 503, and SB 923 amended to conform to HB 503 as passed by the House of Delegates.

Thank you for considering our testimony, and I hope that you will work to advance and pass this important legislation in the 2023 General Assembly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joel Dunn".

Joel Dunn
President and CEO
Chesapeake Conservancy

Senate- HB503- National Aquarium - Greenspace Equi

Uploaded by: Ryan Fredriksson

Position: FAV

Date: March 30, 2023

Bill: HB 503 and SB 923 – Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for House Bill 503 as amended and passed by the House of Delegates and asks that Senate Bill 923 conforms to HB503. The legislation would establish the Greenspace Equity Program, a grant program and targeted funding mechanisms that support the stewardship of vital greenspaces that benefit overburdened or underserved communities.

The Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership is a synergistic collaboration between the Maryland Port Administration (who also own the property), Living Classrooms Foundation, National Aquarium,

and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Together, these partners ensure nearby underserved and overburdened communities have access to 70 acres of water, 52 acres of restored wetlands, three miles of walking trails, a LEED rated education center, and a fishing pier. In 2013, Masonville Cove was designated as the nation's first urban wildlife refuge partnership by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Masonville Cove, South Baltimore

The mission of the Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership is to inspire all people to explore, discover and respect nature, growing the next generation of environmental stewards. Since its inception in 2009, Masonville Cove partners have engaged thousands of community members, students, and volunteers through year-round programming and events such as monthly educational programs (i.e. First Thursdays), Latino Conservation Day, Project Clean Stream, Nature for Kids, Urban Wildlife Conservation Day, and more. Masonville Cove is also home to Baltimore City's only known pair of nesting bald eagles, which have returned in 2023.

Masonville Cove is one example of existing greenspace that could be enhanced and more accessible if this legislation is enacted. A Greenspace Equity Program will advance public health, increase climate resilience, and provide benefits to communities throughout Maryland.

Thank you for your work on this important issue. **We urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report on House Bill 503 as amended and passed by the House of Delegates and ask that Senate Bill 923 conforms to HB503.**

Contact:

Ryan Fredriksson

Vice President, Government Affairs

410-385-8276

rfredriksson@aquarium.org

SRLT GSE Testimony.house.3.27.2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Knebel

Position: FAV



SCENIC RIVERS LAND TRUST
PROTECTING ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY'S LAND AND WATER

Date: March 29, 2023
Bill Number: **SB 923 (and HB 503) - Natural Resources – Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment**
Committee: House Environment and Transportation Committee
Position: Support

Scenic Rivers Land Trust supports the Greenspace Equity Program (SB 923/HB 503 as amended). The goal of this bill is to provide grants to land trusts, NGOs, counties, and municipalities to protect and maintain green space in underserved and overburdened communities throughout Maryland.

Saving the environment begins with saving the land. With the Biden administration's ambitious goal to preserve 30% of U.S. lands by 2030, and many world leaders pushing for an even more lofty goal of 50% of land preserved, it is now more crucial than ever to protect the earth's remaining natural lands and support efforts to advance these goals. This bill will not only support these goals, but do so in a way that is inclusive of underserved and overburdened communities.

Although climate change impacts everyone, it does so unequally. Those in underserved communities are disproportionately feeling its effects, and our efforts to address climate change must account for these discrepancies. Due to a history of insufficient investment in these communities, not only have they become uniquely vulnerable to climate change effects such as rising temperatures and more intense storm events, but they have a disproportionate lack of access to nature and green spaces. This bill promises to address these inequalities and target resources to underserved communities, providing greenspace and curbing the magnitude of climate change effects in these areas.

Scenic Rivers Land Trust serves Anne Arundel County with its mission of working with landowners and other partners to protect natural and scenic areas. Our northern most service area encompasses areas that are densely populated but have little greenspace available. We are excited that this new funding source can conserve and provide stewardship of greenspaces in the communities that need it most.

We know what needs to be done to address climate change and reduce its effects – what we lack is resources. This bill will help us have the resources we need to guarantee a livable environment. The Greenspace Equity Program (SB923/HB 503 as amended) is a necessary step toward ensuring the long-term environmental sustainability for the future of Maryland, and we respectfully request your support.

Sincerely,

Sarah Knebel
Executive Director

Senate Bill 923 - Written Testimony- BTT 3_28_23.p

Uploaded by: Zoe Gensheimer

Position: FAV



BALTIMORE TREE TRUST

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Vice Chair, Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 503 / SB 923 – Greenspace Equity Program - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment,

On behalf of Baltimore Tree Trust, I would like offer our strong support for HB 503 / SB 923, the proposed “Greenspace Equity Program.”

Baltimore Tree Trust is a grassroots, Black-led organization working to plant thousands of trees across our most vulnerable urban neighborhoods. Since our founding in 2008, we have been guided by a singular vision: that *everyone* deserves access to the benefits provided by good water and air quality. We envision a city made up of tree-lined streets that connect residents to large, leafy parks. Our planting crews are out in the field every day working to make this goal a reality. The Greenspace Equity Program will provide essential funding to move our mission forward.

Green spaces, particularly wooded ones, absorb large amounts of water and heat. In urban centers across Maryland, residents are surrounded by impervious surfaces - such as parking lots, roads, and rooftops - that trap heat and increase flooding. Underrepresented communities of color are disproportionately affected by environmental issues caused by lack of green space. As an organization truly committed to environmental justice, we see high value in funding projects within marginalized communities across the state. ALL Marylanders deserve to reside in cool, healthy neighborhoods that are resilient to the effects of global climate change. HB 503/ SB 923 will have a tangible impact on our communities.

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of **SB 923 - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment** (and House Bill 503 as amended). Our organization hopes that you will work to advance and pass this important legislation in the 2023 General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Zoe Gensheimer
Director of Advocacy and Community Engagement