



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.