



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