



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

Board of Directors

Nick Dilks,
Chair
Will Cook,
Vice Chair
Adair Stifel,
Treasurer
John Griffin,
Secretary
Mark Conway
Francis (Joe) Hickman
Mitch Neitzey
Steve Quarles
Barry Salisbury

Gary Burnett,
MET Board Liaison

Wendy Stringfellow
President

Advisory Council

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