



*Forming Faithful Stewards,  
Caring for Sacred Waters*

PO Box 6791  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Greenspace Equity Program  
Senate Bill 923 / House Bill 503  
FAVORABLE**

March 29, 2023

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

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

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

On behalf of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, I write to urge your support for the Greenspace Equity Program, SB 923 (and House Bill 503, as amended) to advance this bill favorably from committee.

Global leaders are calling for conserving 50% of Earth's landmass<sup>1</sup> in the fight of our lives: to combat climate change. This bill rightfully focuses on helping under-resourced urban land trusts, nonprofits, and municipalities green and conserve land in high-density areas. As an organization truly committed to environmental justice, this bill is vitally important.

In urban settings it is not unusual for residents to be the last to hear about proposed developments being planned in their neighborhoods. This sidelines them in decision-making in their own community. The Greenspace Equity Program would level the playing field so that community-based organizations and land trusts can have a fighting chance at guiding how parcels in their communities are used. In our 10+ years of working with faith institutions, they often see the vacant lot down the street from the church or the dilapidated building as they walk to synagogue, but the cost to clean up that property is a very real barrier. This bill proposes a new grant source that would enable congregations and other community-based organizations to obtain funds needed to green the sites and protect them in perpetuity through conservation easements.

This is the dream! Imagine new greening projects where there was previously abandoned sites. Think community gardens, open space areas, community woodlands, green networks, parks,

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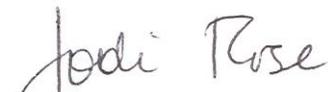
<sup>1</sup> National Geographic, "Half of all land must be kept in a natural state to protect Earth," April 19, 2019.

trails, and urban farms. Eligible grant recipients, including land trusts, nonprofits, and local counties and municipalities, would be able to access badly needed funds to help bring out these projects and restore healing in their communities. Community-based land trusts would further be able to conserve those land spaces in perpetuity, so that the environmental impacts of these projects benefit future generations.

**As people of faith, we are urgently called to address climate change and the threats to vulnerable communities and species.** The Greenspace Equity Program (SB 923 / HB 503) works toward a future where natural areas are valued and protected, biodiversity is recognized as our tool to fight climate change, and money is devoted to community-driven greenspace creation.

Thank you for considering our testimony, and I urge your support for SB 923 / HB 503.

Sincerely,

  
Jodi Rose  
Executive Director