

**Friday, February 17, 2023**

**TO:** Kumar Barve, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation 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 Vice Chair 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 (NGOs), 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, local NGOs, 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.

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, land trusts, and NGOs, the Greenspace Equity Program would provide financial support and decision-making power that will enable communities to restore vacant properties and create spaces that will improve community health and connectivity.

TNC commends Vice Chair 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.**