

February 15, 2023

Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 503. As graduate students at the Bloomberg School of Public Health dedicated to promoting environmental health and advancing health equity, we would like to voice our strong support for this bill.

In our research into the benefits of greenspace, we found that it helps mitigate the effects of climate change by moderating heat, absorbing precipitation, and filtering water and air pollution. Besides these environmentally protective measures, green space has several direct advantages for human health. Green space is associated with better cardiovascular health and lower body mass index due to increased physical activity, which these spaces promote. Green space has the potential to reduce anxiety and depression for this same reason. They provide a place for communities to gather for social events and recreational activities, improving societal cohesion. Overall, green spaces may help promote healthy lifestyles.

While most cities on the East Coast, including Baltimore, contain relatively large amounts of green space, the quality and location vary greatly depending on an area's demographic makeup, including race and socioeconomic status. Historically, segregation and redlining of predominantly black and low-income neighborhoods impeded the planning of green spaces such as large parks and even street trees. The effects of these discriminatory policies still persist in these neighborhoods today. If green space is available, it is often small and may not be entirely accessible, meaning it is unwelcoming (i.e. fenced-off) or unsafe (i.e. arsenic in the soil). This is a major environmental justice concern because it disproportionately affects marginalized communities and their health.

Supporting projects that preserve, create, and enhance community green space in underserved communities can enhance the health and climate resilience of those who are most vulnerable. By establishing the Greenspace Equity Program within the Department of Natural Resources, the disparity in green space maintenance and distribution may be addressed. We ask that you join us in creating a healthier, more equitable Maryland by supporting House Bill 503.

Thank you for your time,

Isabella Ameglio, Kiera Giacomini, Ashley McGrogan, Diba Onochie, and Megan Zercher