

February 17, 2023

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment
House Environment and Transportation Committee

Dear Chairman Barve,

The undersigned organizations urge a favorable report on HB503. Establishing a “Greenspace Equity Program,” this legislation would provide annual state funding to land trusts, local governments and other community partners working in Maryland’s underserved and overburdened communities where the public need for greenspace is often greatest.

In 2022, the Maryland General assembly proposed the Maryland the Beautiful Act, which would have established land conservation goals, supported local land trusts, and created a greenspace equity program to ensure Maryland’s underserved communities retain access to nature. In 2023, however, the Greenspace Equity Program stands separately from Maryland the Beautiful as an opportunity to enhance environmental justice in Maryland’s most vulnerable cities.

Green spaces in cities are a simple and effective tool for improving the health and well-being of residents and the livability of older urban neighborhoods, many of which were designed without regard for greenspace access and have faced disinvestment, compounding environmental and health inequities. Proven health benefits from nature and green spaces include promoting an active lifestyle, abating air pollution, and reducing rates of anxiety and depression. Green spaces also help mitigate the heat island effect and reduce stormwater loads, enhancing resilience to climate change in urban neighborhoods.

While Maryland’s Rural Legacy Program has been made available to aid in conservation of lands in the rural areas of our state, because the program is specified for rural land, it excludes Maryland’s many urban and suburban communities. Often with a higher cost to acquire, urban land trusts face an added financial burden to conserving greenspace in areas of larger population density. In addition to supporting property acquisition, HB503’s grant program would be an invaluable resource to communities maintaining existing green spaces or creating greenspace out of previously developed land. Likewise, since HB503 funds are flexible and provided directly to counties, land trusts, and local NGOs, the Greenspace Equity Program would offer underserved and overburdened communities enhanced self-determination in a greener future.

We strongly urge a favorable report on this important bill.

Arundel Rivers Federation
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Blue Water Baltimore
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights
Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Maryland Public Health Association
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Nature Forward
NeighborSpace of Baltimore County
Prince George's County Audubon Society
ShoreRivers
Southern Maryland Audubon
The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
Waterkeepers Chesapeake



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