



**Testimony in Support with amendments of House Bill 631 -  
Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the  
Beautiful Act)**

February 20, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB631**, on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland's Eastern Shore is defined by its open space and rural character. Preserving these open spaces to protect from development and impervious infrastructure will be an important step toward reducing nutrient pollution in our local waterways, as well as buffering our low-lying communities from rising tides and storm surge resulting from climate change. **The Maryland the Beautiful Act sets state conservation goals to protect 30% of Maryland's land by 2030, and 40% of Maryland's land by 2040. It also creates a \$10M Rapid Response Revolving Loan Fund to help small- and medium-sized land trusts preserve critical lands quickly and allocates more than \$250K in grant funding toward land trusts and community nonprofits for improving the stewardship and health of land.**

As the Chester Riverkeeper, I work with counties, towns, and land conservation organizations within my watershed to create and preserve open spaces. Protected lands have the ability to connect more residents with our waterways, and provide opportunities for reforestation or increased tree canopy, both of which are valuable green infrastructure practices that improve water quality. **Increased funding for land acquisition and stewardship will help organizations like ShoreRivers and our partners achieve local public access goals, connect residents to nature, and implement conservation and restoration practices that improve water quality on the Eastern Shore.**

Preserving land across the Eastern Shore will increase open space for public access and recreation, which in turn fosters respect and stewardship for natural resources like our waterways. It also helps to protect woodlands, grasslands, and marsh lands, which filter nutrients, slow runoff, and buffer our communities from the growing impacts of climate change such as storm surges, rising sea levels, and nuisance flooding. For these reasons, we urge the committee **to adopt a favorable report for HB631.**

Sincerely,  
**Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper** on behalf of ShoreRivers

**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

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