

Committee: House Environment & Transportation
Testimony on: HB 723 Sustainable Maryland Program Fund-Establishment
Submitting: Karen Metchis
Position: Favorable – without amendments
Hearing Date: March 1, 2023

HB 723 & SB 526

Dear Delegate Love,

I recently became aware of a proposed amendment by Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich to remove limits on preservation banking. This is alarming. While some limits could be added to address some concerns, the proposed amendment is too broad and undercuts the State's ability to redress the ongoing loss of forests and to fight climate change. Limits are important for the following reasons:

1. Every acre of replanting obligation offset in a preservation bank *shrinks* the county's forest footprint by that acre. It is, by definition, a net-loss proposition.
2. The loss is compounded when preservation credit is offered on land that is already unlikely to be developed, because of an existing restriction by law or limitation due to site characteristics.
3. The Hughes Center study identified a huge imbalance in banking credits: 4 out of every 5 acres were preserved forest, with only 1 out of 5 acres newly planted.

The list of limitations in the bill significantly curtails the available land area for preservation banking. It is time to take aggressive action to protect and expand forest cover both to preserve biodiversity AND to tackle the onerous challenge of climate change. **Unrestricted banking is simply not acceptable, and I urge you to take caution in accepting any such amendments.**

Thank you for your sponsorship and for voting in favor of HB723 – without watering it down.

Karen Metchis
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