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—
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The Maryland House of Delegates
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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Delegate Dana Stein Testimony in Support of HB 289
Maryland Forestry Education Fund – Establishment

Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Our committee passed this legislation last year 24-1 and the House passed it 122-9. The Senate has passed the cross-file, SB 282, by a vote of 45-0. I'll explain the purpose of this bill.

Twenty years ago, the Forest Service within the Department of Natural Resources had an education program that conducted seminars, school programs, and other educational outreach programs that taught about the importance of forests and trees to many aspects of our lives. Today, we know even more: for example, that trees help sequester carbon from the atmosphere. But ordinary citizens, particularly in urban areas, don't know that, and the education program was eliminated when the agency was downsized from over 130 to about 70 staff. The Maryland Forest Service has not had enough staff to conduct outreach and education about our forests.

The purpose of HB 289 is to build the capacity of existing organizations, such as the Maryland Forestry Foundation (an independent 501c3) and district forestry boards--which were created as a means of outreach to forest landowners—to provide such education. This bill would create a Maryland Forest Education Fund that would provide education and resources to Maryland's forest landowners and local governments for purposes such as healthy forest management, climate science, forest conservation, urban forestry, and other related purposes listed in the bill.

Maryland has long recognized the need to educate residents on the important role agriculture plays in the state by funding the Maryland Agricultural Foundation in 1989 and authorizing the creation and sale of Agricultural license plates. Just as the purpose of the AG Foundation is to educate citizens about the important role agriculture plays in the state, the Maryland Forestry Foundation, through this fund, would do the same for our forests.

I urge you to support HB 289.