



## **HB503 – Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment**

**Testimony before**

**House Environment and Transportation Committee**

**February 17, 2023**

**Position: Favorable**

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **support of HB503**, which would provide grants to eligible applicants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We appreciate the leadership of Delegate Stein in sponsoring this important legislation.

Research has shown that without green spaces, including parks, gardens and forests, some people have a higher risk of health concerns, such as obesity, depression, heart disease, and heat-related illness. Unfortunately, underserved communities, where the residents are often, low-income, non-white, and immigrants, are the communities where you will least likely find these green spaces. This is also true for overburdened communities. If there are green spaces present, they are generally not kept up and dissuade people from enjoying them.

The bill, as present, would work to change that by creating a Greenspace Equity Program, which would develop a grant application, provide technical assistance to applicants, and award grants specifically to overburdened or underserved communities.

However, so often good intentions lead to forcing programs or plans onto a community that is not equipped to benefit fully from it or that does not want it. So it is also encouraging to see that this bill will require consultation and buy in from the community leaders and residents.

For these reasons, we support HB503.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

**We respectfully urge a favorable report.**

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