



*Forming Faithful Stewards,
Caring for Sacred Waters*

PO Box 6791
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention
House Bill 723
FAVORABLE**

February 27, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, I write to urge your support for the Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention bill (HB 723) to advance this bill favorably from committee.

Maryland’s forest losses are staggering: 19,000 acres of forests lost in five years.¹ That’s the equivalent of losing 10 acres of forest every single day for five years. We all know forests are critical for sinking carbon, filtering pollutants out of the air, slowing down rains thereby reducing flooding, and fostering resilient ecosystems. So why are we allowing such loss of forests? In short, it’s because the laws that define and regulate forest conservation date back to 1991 and no longer address present-day circumstances and development pressures.

House Bill 723 will update and strengthen forest goals and definitions to provide clarity, reflect new data, protect and conserve more forest land and tree canopy, and give local governments significantly greater flexibility to pursue solutions that meet local development priorities and advance equity. Maryland’s Forest Conservation Act of 1991 is ill-equipped to address today’s challenges of climate change and watershed pollution and offers an unbalanced reforestation ratio of ¼-acre planted for 1-acre cleared.

Our network of congregations across the state are working hard to plant new trees on their properties, but we cannot keep up with the unsustainable pace of forest losses. **We need**

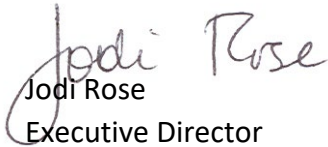
¹ According to Potomac Conservancy, “A recent study published by the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology of the University of Maryland found that Maryland experienced a net statewide forest loss of more than 19,000 acres from 2013 through 2018.”



House Bill 723 to address systemic failures of the 1991 Forest Conservation Act, so that individual efforts to plant trees are not made in vain.

Forests are “Creation’s Cure-All,” meaning they restore balance to the Earth in terms of cleaner water, cleaner air to breathe, flourishing ecosystem, home and habitat for birds and insects, holding the soil from erosion, a place to play, a place to pray. This is a gift entrusted to our care, and it is our responsibility to ensure we are preserving forests, not only for today, but also for tomorrow. **Please support House Bill 723 so that we can strengthen the laws designed to protect healthy forests.**

Sincerely,


Jodi Rose
Executive Director