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**Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 723 – Natural Resources – Preservation and Retention**

Environment and Transportation Committee

March 1, 2023

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of HB723 on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

According to the US EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, an acre of sprawling, suburban roadways and lawns contributes seven times more nitrogen and 30 times more sediment to nearby streams than an acre of forest. Simply put, water quality policy is land use policy, and the best land use policy for water quality is one that halts sprawl and conserves existing forests.

In late 2019, Anne Arundel County passed its own forest conservation bill after losing thousands of acres of forests to sprawl over the previous decade. After a unanimous, bipartisan vote, the new law increased the amount of forest that had to be preserved by an applicant seeking to develop land, prohibited the clearing of large forests greater than 75 acres in size, doubled the mitigation (replanting) requirements, and tripled the fee-in-lieu of mitigation so that applicants had an incentive to mitigate by replanting trees on their site rather than cutting the County a check.

These provisions went a long way in protecting forests and water quality. Applicants are avoiding disturbing larger forests, redevelopment in urban areas is on the rise, and the County is finding ways to get new trees in the ground to replace those that were lost. Moreover, residential development has not ceased. In its *2021 Metropolitan Building Activity Report*, the Baltimore Metropolitan Council stated that "Anne Arundel County led the region by permitting 1,405 new [single-family] units" two years after the new forest protections were passed.

Anne Arundel County is evidence that we do not need to choose between housing and protecting our forests and our waterways. Maryland residents deserve both. For these reasons, Arundel Rivers Federation urges a **FAVORABLE REPORT** on HB723.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt A." followed by a period.

Matthew Johnston  
Executive Director  
Arundel Rivers Federation