



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB723 – Forest Preservation and Retention

February 27, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB723** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland loses about 3,000 acres of forest every year. Forest clearing contributes to poor water quality, fragmentation and loss of wildlife habitat, reduced carbon sequestration, air pollution, increased temperatures, localized flooding, and lower property values. On the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where more than 60% of all land use is shaped by agricultural activities, the negative impacts of irresponsible forestry on an already under forested landscape are more acute, as are its impacts to local water quality.

Forests and trees offer tangible benefits to the state's economy by contributing an estimated \$3.1 billion per year in flood prevention and stormwater mitigation, an estimated \$140 million per year in reducing air pollution, and \$246 million per year in surface water protection (Campbell et al. 2019). These are costs that the state would need to pay if it were to develop and apply technologies to serve these functions.

The outdoor recreation industry is significant to Maryland's economy, contributing \$14 billion per year (Outdoor Industry Association 2017). Currently, the 1.5 million acres of protected land in Maryland (much of which is forested) generates \$4 billion annually (Campbell et al. 2019). At the local individual property level, one large tree can eliminate up to 5,000 gallons of stormwater runoff per year and reduce building energy costs by 15–35% for homes and business owners (State of Maryland 2019).

Trees are one of the most positive long-term investments that can be made to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and many of our trees are threatened by the ongoing effects of climate change, as well as development activity within our watersheds. **This bill will update forest goals and definitions to provide clarity and reflect new data, protect and conserve more forest land and tree canopy, and give local governments flexibility to pursue solutions that meet local needs and advance equity goals.**

We support this bill for increased forest preservation and retention, and urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB723**.

Sincerely,

Zack Kelleher

Sassafras Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

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