



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 22, 2023

HB 631

Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)

House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 631 establishes certain goals and programs related to land conservation; establishing the Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Program to provide loans to certain land trusts to purchase land for conservation purposes; establishing the Land Preservation Rapid Response Advisory Committee to review loan applications and make recommendations on which projects to fund; establishing the Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Fund; requiring the Governor to include \$10,000,000 in the fiscal year 2025 budget bill for the Fund.

In his encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, Pope Francis tells us, *"There is a growing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet... Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it."* House Bill 631 works toward a future where natural areas are valued and protected, biodiversity is recognized as our tool to fight climate change, and money is devoted to community-driven greenspace creation.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 631.

