



Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB0503 - Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program – Establishment
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 17, 2022

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB503. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB503. HB503 will establish a Greenspace Equity Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide grants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities, and establishes a Greenspace Equity Advisory Board in the DNR.

The MLC Climate Justice Wing supports policies that benefit overburdened and underserved communities, which have historically sustained disproportionate environmental harm. By definition, “overburdened communities” are in census tracts that are disproportionately affected by more environmental health indicators. “Underserved communities” are in census tracts with a higher number of low-income residents who are also nonwhite and have limited English-proficiency. HB503 builds on the Maryland the Beautiful Act of 2022 and enhances equity by providing an opportunity to maintain existing green spaces or create greenspace out of previously developed land in overburdened and underserved communities in Maryland.

Urban green spaces provide environmental benefits like reducing urban heat and attenuating air pollution and stormwater runoff, but they also have direct health benefits to the surrounding community. Recent studies have shown how enhanced immune function is linked to contact with nature. Urban green space can reduce stress and have a restorative effect on mental and social health, as well as providing spaces for physical activity and social interaction.

The Greenspace Equity Grant Program will provide resources for land acquisition, but also be an important resource to communities for maintaining existing green spaces or creating greenspace out of previously developed land. For these reasons, we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for HB503 in committee.