



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 17th, 2023

HB 503

Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

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 503 establishes the Greenspace Equity Program in the Department of Natural Resources to provide grants to eligible applicants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened communities and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace and requires the Department to submit each grant award to the Board of Public Works for approval before awarding a grant under the Program.

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." The Greenspace Equity Program (HB 503) 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 respectfully urges a **favorable** report for House Bill 503.