



House Bill 631

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

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation
Committees

Date: February 22, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 631. The bill seeks to establish sustainable long-term programs to accelerate and improve park land acquisition and encourage the development of community green spaces.

The State of Maryland and its counties have been immensely successful at expanding parks lands and developing those spaces into world-class recreation venues. Maryland's prioritization of public recreational spaces has advanced numerous health and economic benefits, a central element in Maryland's "quality of life" proposition.

The proposed Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Program (LLTRLP) will provide local governments with new resources to make their communities more sustainable, livable, and healthy. The LLTRLP is designed to provide low-interest financing to local land trusts that are working with county governments to acquire new green space. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, both state and local greenspaces were filled, often to capacity, as residents sought some form of healthy and safe recreation - it has become abundantly clear that these spaces offer immense value to neighborhoods across the state.

The precise means to launch such a revolving loan program, and the sources for its "seed funding" are a matter of broader public policy, where counties defer to the Committee's wisdom. But the goals of HB 631, to create a sustainable program to advance these goals, is meritorious.

The pandemic has highlighted how critical these spaces can be to a healthy and vibrant community. HB 631 would provide county governments and partners with additional resources to expand park sizes and greenspaces. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 631 a **FAVORABLE** report.