



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0723:

Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention

****FAVORABLE****

March 1, 2023

TO: Hon. Kumar P. Barve, Chair, Hon. Dana Stein, Vice Chair and the members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Albert H Todd, Member, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 28, 2023

What if we asked our best engineers to build a machine that could remove pollution from the air and water, suck up CO2 from the atmosphere, filter runoff and groundwater, cool our communities and reduce energy consumption; and, in addition, could do all these things without using any electricity or fuel, at minimal cost to operate and maintain, and be delivered in such a diversity of colors, shapes, and sizes, that almost any community would welcome the installation of such a machine in their neighborhood. They could not improve on a tree. Next to us humans, trees are one of God's most miraculous creations.

In our efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay, we seem almost exclusively focused on fixing problems – many of which we have created by removing trees and forests from the land! We need to pay attention to conserving those parts of our watershed that already protect our waters—like those marvelous natural machines -- our forests.

Since you woke up today, we lost 10 acres of forest in Maryland. Tomorrow we will lose another 10 acres and so on and so on each day into the future. This rate of loss has declined from a decade ago according to recent studies, but it is still far too much, too fast. It will soon be impossible to maintain healthy streams, restore our Chesapeake Bay, or maintain our own health in the face of this loss of forest lands.

The science is clear; with each acre of forest converted to other uses, we increase the nitrogen and phosphorus pollution into our waterways, we reduce our health, and we diminish habitats. While planting new trees is a worthy investment, it is difficult to replace existing mature healthy forests. It is like walking up a down escalator. We can hardly add enough trees to offset the losses. We continue to lose ground.



Forest clearing has significant negative impacts on water quality, air quality, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, property values, and increases localized flooding. In and around our cities, tree canopy may be the single most practical strategy for adjusting to the serious effects of warming due to climate change. For our waters, buffers of forest along streams are one of our most effective means to fight warming temperatures and reduce pollution. The State of Maryland acknowledged all of this when it passed the landmark Forest Conservation Act in 1992. This progressive legislation is unlike any other in the nation, and the State is to be commended for its far-reaching vision. But, the FCA is flawed and not always enforced, making it hard to achieve its true intent.

The Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention Bill will clarify and strengthen the FCA and its protections for forests while increasing the total acreage of forest.

The faith community has been actively engaged in advocacy for previous forest conservation actions taken at the State and local level. The faith community shares a deep connection with trees through scripture and in spiritual practice and have planted thousands of trees on their properties and in their communities. Forests are a special part of God's creation left to our care. Our inability to stem the loss of forests now, is stealing this critical resource from our children. We urge support for the stronger restrictions on the clearing of forests and the requirements for mitigation of loss due to development as well as using forests more effectively to improve our air and water..

The Diocese of Maryland supports a favorable outcome and passage of this Bill.