

SB 645: Great Maryland Trails Act  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Brendan Wray - FAVORABLE

February 16, 2024

Chair and Committee Members,

Maryland has the potential to be a top-tier state in the nation with multi-use trails that support activities that contribute to our economy, environment, and quality of life. SB 645, the Great Maryland Trails Act, will help ensure Maryland can fully leverage our progress, resources, and opportunity. A Maryland State Office of Trails will help achieve the State's vision, secure funding, ensure coordination, and maximize the beneficial impacts of trails to our economy, public health, transportation equity, and quality of life.

Maryland needs coordination, strategic oversight, and increased investments in trails. Although Maryland has many exceptional and diverse trails, communities and advocates have identified a large backlog of maintenance projects and new trail projects that need attention. Increasing trail connectivity will return more than is put in due to network effects of increased usage, and increased access to destinations via trails will allow users to reduce vehicle trips, in line with Governor Moore's goal to reduce carbon emissions by 60 percent from 2006 levels by 2031. A trails office will facilitate increased funding, including through federal grants such as federal active transportation opportunities. Other states, including neighboring Virginia, plus Florida, Massachusetts, and Connecticut have established state trails.

Investing in Maryland's multi-use trail networks and bicycling infrastructure makes economic sense. Maryland's outdoor recreation already generates \$14 billion in consumer spending and supports 109,000 jobs, more trails and support will expand these outcomes. According to a study from the University of Massachusetts, an average 11.4 jobs per million dollars spent are created with bicycle projects, compared to 7.8 jobs for road-only projects. Having done two multi-day bike tours with a group of 6 bunking and dining across Missouri on the 270-mile continuous Katy Trail, as well as one tour with my wife of the C&O Canal in Maryland, I have contributed to the economic impact a first-class trail system brings to a state. Two weekends ago I met a woman having breakfast at Proteus Brews in College Park from the Bronx, NY biking on a multi-day tour south towards Florida primarily along the East Coast Greenway, even though the ECG currently requires a good amount of road riding. I can only imagine the additional tourists and economic activity we would see with a connected trail system that would accommodate more casual riders.

The new trails and connected networks supported through the Great Maryland Trails Act will advance active transportation and recreation demanded by residents, leverage economic impacts, and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. I urge a Favorable SB 645 committee report and Senate floor vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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