



SB0645: The Great Maryland Trails Act
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Terps For Bike Lanes – FAVORABLE

February 1, 2024

Chair Feldman and Committee Members,

I am writing this testimony on behalf of Terps For Bike Lanes in support of SB 635. We believe that this bill is a cornerstone initiative that aligns with our organization's mission to enhance bicycle infrastructure and promote sustainable and inclusive transportation options in and around the University of Maryland. The establishment of a state office dedicated to overseeing the creation of a Statewide Trail Plan and promoting the planning and development of trails for both transportation and recreation is a crucial step towards fostering a more bike-friendly and accessible Maryland. The Great Maryland Trails Act mirrors a recommendation in the draft 2050 Maryland Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, emphasizing the importance of creating a trails team to serve as a liaison between stakeholders, enhance coordination, update the Statewide Trail Plan, and facilitate the execution of regional trail projects.

Drawing inspiration from successful models in other states that have implemented similar trails offices, this bill holds the promise of advancing trail development, coordinating local trail plans, securing additional federal funding, and significantly expanding Maryland's trails networks. As members of the Terps for Bike Lanes executive board, we recognize the potential of The Great Maryland Trails Act to create safer, more accessible, and interconnected trail systems that will benefit our community and the state at large. By supporting this legislation, Maryland has an opportunity to lead in sustainable transportation practices and reinforce its commitment to the well-being of its residents. We believe that The Great Maryland Trails Act is a keystone bill that can pave the way for a more environmentally conscious, active, and healthy future for our state.

Compiled research and case studies vividly demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of trails, underscoring their positive impact on both the environment and public health. The reports from

the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy shed light on the substantial environmental advantages, emphasizing reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, and decreased traffic congestion resulting from the implementation of trails. The American Forests' report further underscores the role of trails as green infrastructure in mitigating climate change, showcasing their ability to absorb carbon dioxide and alleviate the urban heat island effect. On the health front, the literature review published in the Journal of Physical Activity and Health establishes a strong connection between trail use and increased physical activity levels, improved mental health, and a lowered risk of chronic diseases.

Economic considerations also play a pivotal role, as highlighted by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's report on the economic impacts of trails. The findings reveal that trails not only generate tourism revenue but also create jobs and boost property values, contributing significantly to economic activity. We have sought to provide real-world examples of other successful trail initiatives, emphasizing key factors such as strong partnerships, dedicated funding, and a data-driven approach. We hope our endorsement will contribute to this bill's passage and help Maryland emerge as a national leader in environmental stewardship. We recognize that this is a challenging fiscal year and support amending the bill so that it aligns with the resource capacity of participating agencies, especially in MDOT, DNR, and MDP. We do not envision any transfer of positions but prefer collaboration among the agencies named in the bill. We urge a Favorable committee report on this legislation and encourage the Senate to pass it on the floor.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Marks

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