

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support with Amendments – SB 290 – Natural Resources – Roadside Tree Removal Permit Notification Act

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports Senate Bill 290, with amendment, and offers the following information for the Committee's consideration.

SB 290 requires applicants for roadside tree removal permits¹ to provide notice of the application to owners of abutting and adjacent properties. In addition, the applicant must notify the governing body of any common ownership community that has control over the land on which the tree subject to the application is located.

The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) considers tree protection a key part of our mission. Trees and plants not only beautify our communities; they play a vital role in keeping our environment healthy. The SHA has an entire department – The Office of Environmental Design – dedicated to environmental stewardship.

When the SHA determines construction activities for new roadway projects will impact roadside trees, the SHA follows all laws, obtains necessary permits, and plants new trees as necessary to replace any that are removed. The SHA makes every effort to protect trees, especially those which are rare or endangered. In some cases, road alignments have shifted solely to protect trees considered “specimen” or “significant.”

In addition to new projects, SHA maintenance secures blanket permits to manage issues that arise year-round, including trimming and tree removal where the trees create hazard or interfere with sight distance. In cases involving safety, the SHA must act quickly. Adding additional requirements for the State to notify abutting and adjacent property owners is not practical due to the exigency and because the specific removal locations are unknown until a problem arises.

If applied to the state, the SHA estimates the potential fiscal impact of SB 290 to be \$40,000 per

¹ As background, subject to certain exceptions, a person that seeks to cut down or trim any roadside tree shall apply to the Department of Natural Resources for a permit. Article – Natural Resources, § 5-406. Current law defines a “roadside tree” as any tree or shrub growing within the right-of-way of any public road. Article – Natural Resources, § 5-401.

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year for Roadside Tree Permits associated with capital projects and \$120,000 per year if notification is required for maintenance activities.

The SHA has worked with the sponsor of this bill and the concerns communicated above have been resolved with the sponsor's amendment, which excludes state and local government entities from the application the bill. The SHA supports SB 290 with the sponsor's amendments.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information during its deliberation of Senate Bill 290 and issue a favorable report with the suggested amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

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