

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Howard and Montgomery Counties

Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 968 - Howard County - Patuxent River Wildland - Use of Motor Vehicles and Motorized Equipment Ho. Co. 5-25

March 11, 2025

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB 968, which aims to balance environmental preservation with public safety by ensuring trail maintenance within the Patuxent Wildland.

Currently, the trails within the Patuxent Wildland, cherished by so many Howard County residents, have become overgrown and increasingly unsafe. Due to existing restrictions on using motorized equipment in designated state wildland areas, routine trail maintenance has been limited. As a result, the trails have become overgrown and pose a risk not only to park visitors, but also to first responders, whose access in emergency situations is hindered.

Recognizing the urgency of this issue, my office began working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) last year to find a solution. In February, DNR verbally agreed to enter into an MOU with the Howard County Iron Bridge Hounds (HCIBH) which would allow them to maintain trails for emergency access. At this time, we did not believe legislation was necessary. However, unforeseen legal challenges withheld DNR from granting HCIBH authorization to use motorized equipment to maintain the trails.

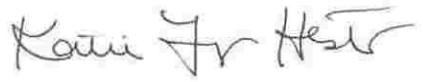
SB 968 ensures that the Patuxent Wildlands remain protected, while allowing for emergency access to the trails in worst case scenarios. Specifically, this bill allows DNR to enter into use agreements with volunteers to facilitate the use of motorized vehicles and equipment within the Patuxent Wildland for the **sole purpose** of maintaining **existing** trails to ensure clear and safe access.

This legislation reflects the concerns of my constituents, many of whom have written in to express their support for a practical solution. Passing this legislation will allow parkgoers to continue to enjoy hiking, hunting, and horseback riding safely by maintaining existing trails. As

administrations change, we must ensure the continued preservation of this beautiful land while prioritizing our citizens' safety.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 968.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester