



House Bill 717

Natural Resources—Public Lands—Acquisitions, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Position: **FAV**

Date: **February 12, 2025**

To: **Environment and
Transportation**

On behalf of the Caroline County Commissioners, we wish to express our strong support for **House Bill 717 – Natural Resources—Public Lands—Acquisitions, Staffing, Operations, and Funding**, particularly the provisions that provide greater flexibility for local governments in utilizing Program Open Space (POS) funds. As a resource challenged rural county that has met its land acquisition goals based on the 2022 LPPRP, and has made significant investments in land acquisition through POS, we need the ability to direct funding toward the development and enhancement of these properties to better serve our residents.

While POS has been instrumental in preserving open space, the reality is that land alone does not meet the needs of our communities. Without the necessary infrastructure—trails, facilities, playgrounds, and accessibility improvements—these spaces remain underutilized. The ability to have the flexibility to apply planning and acquisition POS funds toward developing what we already own, rather than being restricted to further acquisitions when we have met our prescribed goals, is critical to ensuring that our public lands are accessible and beneficial to the people they were meant to serve.

Additionally, we urge the General Assembly to consider making these provisions retroactive so that unencumbered planning and acquisition POS funds for counties like ours, which have already met our land goals, can access additional funding to improve and develop these sites. This is especially important in Caroline County, where the need for recreational amenities and infrastructure far outweighs the need for additional land purchases.

House Bill 717 takes a thoughtful approach to balancing conservation with practical use, and we appreciate the effort to ensure that local governments have the flexibility to meet the needs of their communities. We respectfully request your support for this bill and stand ready to provide any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

J. Travis Breeding, President