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House Bill 717 – Natural Resources – Public Lands – Acquisition, Staffing, Operations and Funding

Testimony Before the Environment and Transportation Committee

The State Ethics Commission provides this informational written testimony to explain the impact of this proposed legislation as set forth in the agency's fiscal note submitted on this bill. The State Ethics Commission has been advised that an amendment will be offered on HB 717. As amended, HB 717 will not have a fiscal impact on the State Ethics Commission. The legislation would have a small operational impact that the agency can absorb with its current resources. The State Ethics Commission will be required to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide guidance and receive reports related to DNR officials or employees serving as an official or director of an agency affiliated foundation. This legislation provides for exemptions from certain conflict of interest provisions of the Public Ethics Law for agency employees serving in specific roles with the agency-affiliated foundation. The legislation, as amended, is consistent with prior legislation allowing similar exemptions for the employees of other State agencies who serve in various capacities with other agency-affiliated foundations with other State agencies such as the Maryland Stadium Authority, TEDCO and the University of Maryland Baltimore. In those instances, the exemption provisions for affiliated foundation activities are contained in the agency's specific enabling statute for the affiliated foundation rather than in the provisions of the Public Ethics Law.