HB 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 12, 2025

Contact: Anna Mudd, Potomac Conservancy

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

Potomac Conservancy is the region's leading clean water advocate, fighting to ensure the Potomac River boasts clean drinking water, healthy lands, and vibrant communities. We combine the grassroots power of over 30,000 supporters with conservation and policy initiatives to restore the Potomac River to full health. Our organization requests a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report for House Bill 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding.

Established under the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 1969, Program Open Space symbolizes Maryland's long-term commitment to conserving our natural resources while providing exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities for our citizens. Today more than 6,900 park and conservation area projects have been assisted through Program Open Space Local grants.

The provision in House Bill 717 that concerns Potomac Conservancy would allow the Department of Natural Resources to redirect up to $50 million from the current acquisition funding balance to the park operation, maintenance and improvements. There would then be a cap in place that the balance in DNR acquisition could never exceed $80 million. Potomac Conservancy suggests that if funds must be reallocated it is made clear that the funds need to be paid back over 3 years in accordance with legislation that was passed in 2016. If funding is cut and not paid back, Maryland will lose countless opportunities to preserve land that is increasingly vulnerable to development pressure in the Potomac region.

For these reasons, **Potomac Conservancy requests a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report for House Bill 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding.**

Sincerely,

Anna Mudd
Senior Policy Director
Potomac Conservancy