



## PARTNERS *for* OPEN SPACE

### HB 717 – Natural Resources – Public Lands – Acquisition, Staffing, Operations and Funding Hearing House Environment and Transportation Committee – February 12, 2025

#### POSITION: Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce and Distinguished Committee Members:

Partners for Open Space support many of the provisions of HB 717. We are encouraged by the efforts to make the acquisition process more efficient by allowing state side Program Open Space to use an Easement Valuation System. The proposed foundation supporting DNRs parks will no doubt be successful as many residents recognize the tremendous value of and support for the outdoor recreational economy.

We appreciate DNR's efforts to find a long term, sustainable source of funding for park operations, maintenance and development. However, the proposal to redirect funding from the current land acquisition balance to other state park functions is not a sustainable solution. The income that the state receives from the transfer tax varies greatly from year to year in response to the real estate market. Indeed, the current balance in the DNR acquisition fund is largely the result of an "over-attainment" of \$122 million, or 43% of the projected FY 24 revenue. But this year the transfer tax revenue was reduced by \$85 million or roughly 38% of the total projected FY26 transfer tax revenue. It is precisely this volatility and response to the market that makes the transfer tax an excellent land acquisition tool, but a very poor tool to use for ongoing expenses and salaries.

If legislation must be passed to reduce some of the fund balance, it should be clearly designated as a transfer from the Special Fund to the General Fund and re-paid over the subsequent 3 fiscal years. A permanent reallocation of the acquisition funds will significantly decrease the likelihood that we can meet the state goal of preserving 40% of the land in Maryland by the year 2040, in addition to making it more difficult to acquire the infill parcels that enhance access to the existing park system. We urge your continued support of the funding for these critical programs, while we work together to find creative solutions to fund the ongoing operation, maintenance and development needs of Maryland's state parks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Charlotte Davis, Co-chair  
Partners for Open Space

Owen Bailey, Co-chair  
Partners for Open Space

*Partners for Open Space Steering Committee Members*

**Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition**, Ann Jones; **Chesapeake Bay Commission**, Mark Hoffman; **Chesapeake Bay Foundation**, Matt Stegman, **Chesapeake Conservancy**, Mark Conway; **The Conservation Fund**, Bill Crouch; **The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy**, Owen Bailey; **Forever Maryland/Harford Land Trust** Kristen Kirkwood; **Maryland Association of County Parks and Recreation Administrators** Jessica Leys; **The Nature Conservancy**, Michelle Dietz; **League of Conservation Voters**, Kristen Harbeson; **Potomac Conservancy**, Anna Mudd; **Rural Maryland Council**, Charlotte Davis; **The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium**, Lucille Walker; **The Trust for Public Land**, Kent Whitehead.