



Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

The Honorable Benjamin Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

cc: Members, Appropriations Committee

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Forever Maryland and the additional undersigned organizations, we write in **strong support of House Bill 609 – State Transfer Tax – Land Preservation Special Fund – Revenue Allocation.**

Forever Maryland is the statewide coalition representing nearly 30 land trusts and land conservation organizations. Land trusts work in every region of the state to conserve farms, forests, waterways, wildlife habitat, and culturally significant landscapes in collaboration with state and local government and a wide variety of other conservation nonprofits.

Enacted in 1969, Maryland's transfer tax, a small tax on real estate transactions, was the nation's first dedicated funding source for land conservation. The ½% transfer tax funds the purchase and development of state and local parkland, the protection of farmland through voluntary conservation easements, the purchase and protection of valuable ecological land, supports Heritage Areas, and works to provide young farmers with access to land. This model has made Maryland a national land preservation leader.

Land conservation depends on dedicated and reliable funding of Maryland's key land preservation programs - Program Open Space, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, and Rural Legacy.

Land preservation is not only an environmental priority — it is a vital economic development strategy for Maryland. Protected farms, forests, and open spaces bolster agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, tourism, and small businesses that form the backbone of rural economies across Maryland. These lands also provide critical public benefits, including clean drinking water, flood mitigation, reduced infrastructure costs, and essential public parks.

Land preservation is also essential to achieving the State's broader conservation and climate goals. Preserved lands store carbon, increase climate resilience, protect biodiversity, and help maintain connected natural landscapes. Maryland has committed, through **Maryland the Beautiful**, to conserving 40% of the State's land by 2040. Stable, predictable funding is the linchpin to achieving this goal.

HB609 restores the core promise of Maryland's Program Open Space - that revenues collected are committed for the protection of Maryland's great outdoors.

Diverting these special funds for general fund purposes without a realistic plan and timeline for paying them back undermines our health, our heritage, and our economy. It also weakens long-term conservation planning and places Maryland's climate, conservation, and land preservation goals further out of reach. Importantly, funding delays and diversions increase the ultimate cost of conservation, as land values rise, development pressure intensifies, and time-sensitive opportunities with willing landowners are lost.

Maryland's conservation success is built on partnerships. State funding enables land trusts and public agencies to leverage local, private, and federal dollars efficiently. When dedicated funds are diverted, projects are delayed or abandoned, matching funds are forfeited, and landowners lose confidence in the State's commitment to conservation.

SB424 takes prudent and necessary action by reaffirming the General Assembly's long-standing intent to safeguard transfer tax revenues for their intended purpose of land preservation.

Forever Maryland and the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB609**. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership on behalf of Maryland's communities, landscapes, and future generations.

Forever Maryland member organizations

American Chestnut Land Trust	Land Trust Alliance
Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition	Land Preservation Trust
Baltimore Green Space	Long Green Land Trust
Casey Trees	Lower Shore Land Trust
Catoctin Land Trust	Magothy River Land Trust
Cecil Land Trust	NeighborSpace of Baltimore County
Chesapeake Conservancy	Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust
Conservancy For Charles County	Potomac Conservancy
Crownsville Conservancy	Rockburn Land Trust
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy	Scenic Rivers Land Trust
Green Trust Alliance	The Manor Conservancy
Gunpowder Valley Conservancy	The Nature Conservancy Maryland/DC
Harford Land Trust	Trust For Public Land
Howard County Conservancy	The Conservation Fund

Supporting organizations

Arundel Rivers Federation	Maryland Forests Association
Audubon of Central Maryland	National Parks Conservation Association
Audubon Mid-Atlantic	Preservation Maryland
Chesapeake Bay Foundation	Safe Skies Maryland
Indivisible HoCoMD	Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
Maryland Eastern Shore Trails Network (MESTN)	Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
Maryland Farm Bureau	Southern Maryland RC&D
Maryland League of Conservation Voters	Valleys Planning Council
	Vernal Pool Partners