



PARTNERS *for* **OPEN SPACE**

February 16, 2026

Testimony on SB 424

State Transfer Tax – Land Preservation Special Fund – Revenue Allocation

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Partners for Open Space, a statewide coalition of Maryland’s leading agricultural, recreation, historic preservation, and land conservation organizations, we voice our support of Senate Bill 424. This legislation restores the integrity of Maryland’s land conservation funding by reversing the diversion of State Transfer Tax revenues away from the programs that rely upon them.

Senate Bill 424 restores the core promise of the State Transfer Tax by removing the provision that had blocked repayment of previously diverted funds. By reinstating the State’s obligation to repay these diversions, the bill ensures that Maryland’s land conservation programs remain whole and that the long-standing trust in this dedicated revenue source is preserved. This commitment signals to counties and conservation partners that the State intends to maintain the financial stability of Program Open Space, the Rural Legacy Program, and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, even during periods of fiscal pressure. In doing so, it upholds the central principle that conservation funding is essential to Maryland’s environmental resilience, not an optional addition to the State budget.

Restoring the full transfer tax revenue is essential to Maryland’s broader environmental commitments. Conservation funding is one of the State’s most powerful tools to protect against climate change, restore the health of the Bay, preserve forests and wetlands that store carbon and absorb stormwater, and safeguard the natural landscapes that protect communities from flooding and sea level rise. When these revenues are diverted, even briefly, Maryland loses ground on the goals outlined in the Maryland the Beautiful Act and risks falling short of its statewide land conservation commitments.

The benefits of restoring these revenues extend far beyond program budgets. Local governments across Maryland directly rely on land preservation funding to maintain parks, protect farmland, preserve rural landscapes, and support the infrastructure of outdoor recreation that strengthens local economies. Ensuring that the full balance of the special fund remains dedicated to its intended purposes is an investment in public trust as well as public land.



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We also note that these concerns are shared statewide. Partners for Open Space, along with a broad coalition of conservation, recreation, and community groups, has voiced strong support for restoring diverted revenues to ensure that Maryland's land preservation programs continue to function as designed.

For all of these reasons, the Partners for Open Space respectfully asks the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 424.

Sincerely,

Owen Bailey, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space

Charlotte Davis, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space