



Testimony on SB 284 – Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee – March 4, 2026
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Position: Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition. We represent the 5 active Land Trust in the county – The Gunpowder Valley Conservancy, the Land Preservation Trust, The Manor Conservancy, Neighborspace Baltimore County and the Long Green Valley Conservancy.

We appreciate the funding provided in the BRFA for the programs funded by the that define the best of Maryland to include State and Local side Program Open Space, The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, the Rural Legacy Program, the Maryland Heritage Areas, and the Greenspace Equity program. Together this suite of programs fund everything from your neighborhood playground to the most sensitive ecological areas in the state.

While appreciating and supporting the BRFA there are a few concerns that I would like to raise.

- 1-) We would urge you to return to full cash funding, not bonds, as soon as possible.
- 2-) The payments on the bonds issued must come from the General Fund, as to do otherwise would be an even greater detriment to the programs in the future.
- 3-) Last year's BRFA decreased the funding available for land and easement acquisition by \$100 million over 4 years. Any further reduction would be devastating to those programs.
- 4-) The BRFA includes a provision that reallocates funds to the Department of Planning for the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. While this is a relatively small amount of money, it is indicative of the continued reallocation of the transfer tax from its intended purpose.
- 5-) Legislation passed in 2025 allows DNR to use unspent balances in state side Program Open Space land acquisition for purposes other than land acquisition. The BRFA increases both the likelihood that this will happen and the amount that could be transferred by adding the Heritage Conservation Fund balance to the pot that can be taken.

Finally, I would like to briefly address the \$100 million cut authorized in last year's BRFA. DNR has estimated that this cut will result in 20,000 less acres being protected. To put that in perspective Gunpowder State Park is 18,000 acres; Patapsco Valley State Park is 16,000 acres; and Sandy Point State Park, arguably one of the most popular parks in the state is 786 acres. The average farm size in Maryland is 158 acres, so 125 farms could be protected with conservation easements were the funding made available. These lands represent significant assets for the economic viability, health and ecology of the state.

We understand the budget constraints and urge you to consider reinstating/repaying the \$100 million as soon as the budget allows. Thank you for helping to make sure that our most important farms, forests and ecological areas are indeed protected in perpetuity.