



PARTNERS *for* **OPEN SPACE**

March 2, 2026

Re: Support of the Governor's FY27 Proposed Budget
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Partners for Open Space, the statewide coalition representing Maryland's land conservation, historic preservation, outdoor recreation, working lands, and natural resource programs, we write in support of Governor Moore's proposed FY 27 budget and its commitment to land conservation, outdoor recreation, agricultural vitality, and the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

For decades, Maryland has recognized that its lands and waters are not luxuries but foundations of economic strength, community well-being, and long-term resilience. Programs like Program Open Space, the Rural Legacy Program, the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, the Heritage Areas Program, and the Greenspace Equity Fund have produced returns that far exceed their cost. They anchor rural economies, sustain working farms, elevate the stories and cultural identities that define our historic places, expand equitable access to parks and natural spaces, shape walkable and enduring communities, protect drinking water, support fisheries and outdoor industries, and ensure that future generations inherit a landscape that still carries the character and abundance of this remarkable state.

The Governor's proposed budget continues the stability these programs require. That stability is not simply a fiscal matter. It is the foundation on which counties, towns, land trusts, farmers, Heritage Area Authorities, and local parks departments make decisions that reverberate through decades. Long-term, predictable funding allows communities to plan for outdoor recreation investments, secure easements that preserve working landscapes, strengthen heritage tourism and cultural interpretation, and expand park access in places historically underserved by public investment.

We are especially heartened to see the budget's alignment with the state's climate objectives, its economic competitiveness, and its dedication to equity in access to nature. Outdoor recreation is now one of the fastest growing sectors of the national economy, and Maryland's parks, natural lands, Heritage Areas, and cultural landscapes play a central role in that success. Investments in local and state parks create jobs, attract visitors, broaden recreational opportunities, reduce health disparities, and strengthen community cohesion, all while preserving the natural and historic elements that make Maryland such a desirable place to live and work.



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The Greenspace Equity Fund, in particular, stands as a testament to the state's belief that every resident, regardless of zip code, deserves safe, welcoming, nearby access to parks and nature. This program expands opportunity in communities where green space has been scarce, providing children and families with places to gather, play, and breathe fresh air in landscapes shaped by care rather than neglect.

We also note that preserving agricultural land remains essential not only for food production but for the cultural and economic fabric of rural Maryland. Every acre protected strengthens multigenerational farms and supports local economies.

Partners for Open Space applauds the Governor for honoring Maryland's long-standing commitment to programmatic funding levels, for safeguarding the integrity of dedicated revenue sources, and for placing conservation, heritage, equity, and community resilience at the heart of a forward-looking vision for the state. While we recognize that a portion of the program's support may, in the near term, be provided through capital funds and bonds, we urge the state to restore full cash funding and to uphold the formula as it was originally conceived, ensuring that the program remains stable, reliable, and true to its intent. We ask the Committee to approve the proposed budget and to continue protecting the programs that preserve Maryland's natural assets, historic resources, cultural landscapes, working lands, and public parks. These investments sustain communities across the entire state and help ensure that the landscapes we cherish remain intact and thriving for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration and for your steadfast leadership on behalf of Maryland's lands, waters, cultural heritage, parks, and people. We stand ready to support the Committee throughout the session and beyond.

Sincerely,

Owen Bailey, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space

Charlotte Davis, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space