



HOPE HARBOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Together for a Better Tomorrow

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HB959 Written Testimony | Jasmine Brown

Committee: Environment & Transportation
Testimony on: HB 959 – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2026

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

On behalf of Hope Harbor Community Development Corporation, I am writing to express our **strong support for House Bill 959 – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park**. As an organization dedicated to strengthening neighborhoods, expanding access to opportunity, and improving quality of life for the residents of the Edmondson Corridor in West Baltimore, we view this legislation as a transformative step toward environmental justice, community health, and long-term economic vitality.

By establishing Gwynns Falls as a state park, Maryland has the opportunity to spark a new era of inclusive growth and neighborhood revitalization in West Baltimore. State-level research demonstrates that parks are powerful economic catalysts; according to the National Recreation and Park Association's Economic Impact of Local Parks report, local park and recreation agencies generated billions in economic activity across states. Top states such as California, Florida, Texas, and New York each see \$10–21 billion in annual economic impact from park operations and capital spending, including:

- Direct spending by park agencies
- Indirect and induced spending in the local/surrounding economy
- Visitor spending, which includes tourism-related dollars
- Resulting tax revenue at the state and local levels

Maryland's own local park systems contribute to this national pattern of measurable economic return, supporting jobs, strengthening local business ecosystems, and increasing municipal tax bases through higher property values and visitor spending. The Maryland Park Service's earlier State Parks Economic Impact Study estimated that Maryland state parks alone contributed approximately \$650 million annually to Maryland's economy. These findings reinforce what decades of urban planning research has shown — that well-maintained parks reliably increase surrounding property values, stimulate local commerce, and expand long-term tax revenue for cities and states.

Gwynns Falls has the potential to deliver economic and community benefits on a scale comparable to — and in some ways greater than — Maryland's most successful state parks. Gwynns Falls offers an extraordinary 1,216 acre green corridor embedded directly within Baltimore City, placing a major state-managed natural asset within walking distance of tens of thousands of residents who currently lack access to high-quality open space. Unlike Assateague or Sandy Point, which rely heavily on seasonal tourism, Gwynns Falls would serve a dense, year-round urban population while still attracting regional visitors for its historic mill sites, mature forest canopy, stream valley ecosystem, and extensive trail



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network. Its proximity to major institutions — including Coppin State University, Baltimore City Community College, and multiple public schools — positions it as a uniquely powerful hub for outdoor education, workforce development, and community programming. In short, Gwynns Falls combines the ecological richness of one of the largest urban woodland parks in the United States with the accessibility and daily-use potential of an urban anchor, giving it the capacity to generate sustained economic activity, strengthen neighborhood business corridors, and deliver measurable public health and environmental benefits

With HB 959, Maryland can harness these proven economic dynamics to create a vibrant, accessible state park that uplifts surrounding neighborhoods and contributes to a stronger regional economy. Establishing Gwynns Falls as a state park would:

Promote Environmental Health and Resilience by protecting critical watershed areas that directly impact the health of West Baltimore communities, supporting cleaner air, and improving stormwater management.

Advance Equity and Community Well-Being by expanding access to safe, well-maintained green space for families we serve who have long deserved such a resource. It will create opportunities for recreation, outdoor education, and intergenerational programming, and strengthen community pride and connection through shared public assets.

Catalyze Local Economic Opportunity by attracting visitors and investment to neighborhoods that have historically been excluded from Maryland's tourism and park infrastructure. This patronage will support job creation in a variety of industries, and galvanize economies near the natural resource like the renewed Edmondson Village Shopping Center. All of these forces will encourage thoughtful, community-driven revitalization that aligns with residents' needs and aspirations.

Hope Harbor CDC is committed to supporting the West Baltimore Communities in the Edmondson Corridor, and we believe HB 959 aligns powerfully with that mission. Establishing Gwynns Falls State Park would signal a clear commitment from the State of Maryland to environmental justice, equitable development, and the well-being of Baltimore's residents.

We respectfully urge you to pass House Bill 959 and help bring this vision to life. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jasmine Brown

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Executive Director

Hope Harbor Community Development Corporation



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