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Mr. Chairman and MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE Environment and Transportation Committee

Support for HB 533

MEL NOLAND WOODLAND INCENTIVES & FELLOWSHIP FUND – REPORTING

The Maryland Forestry Foundation coordinates the work of Maryland's Forestry Board and works with landowners, the education community, and government at all levels on tree planting and a variety of forestry programs. We have long noted the shortfall in deposits to the Mel Noland fund for forest land sales. For many years, in more than half of all counties, no such sales were reported; therefore, no tax deposits were transferred to the fund. While small by some standards, the current \$200,000 tax cap is significant for many forestry programs. The issues leading to this situation were ignored or overlooked.

The recent State Auditor's report substantiated our concern and recommended correcting and recovering over \$430,000 for the years 2020 to 2023. We believe the actual shortfall has exceeded two million dollars over the past several decades.

The proposed legislation recognizes Maryland's budgetary challenges and does not advocate full retroactive reimbursement to the Fund, despite the \$430,225 sought by the State Auditor. *However, it would be helpful to have an accurate accounting of this four-decade shortfall.* The Foundation joins others in the forestry community and **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** the enactment of HB 533 as a fully warranted measure of long-overdue accountability. We ask for your support for this legislation and for the transparency and full accounting required.

Sincerely,

Gary G. Allen

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President, Maryland Forestry Foundation
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