



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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February 24, 2026

BILL NUMBER: **HOUSE BILL 471**

SHORT TITLE: **PUBLIC SAFETY – STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS – USE OF UNMANNED AIRCRAFT**

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: **OPPOSE**

### EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

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The department opposes HB 471 due to concerns over its impact on law enforcement operations and public safety. The use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) is a necessary and responsibly regulated tool for conservation law enforcement agencies tasked with protecting extensive public lands and waterways that are open to public use and where there is no reasonable expectation of privacy.

The Natural Resource Police (NRP) operate across remote and environmentally sensitive areas where UAS enhance officer safety, improve situational awareness, and support essential functions such as general law enforcement, search and rescue operations, emergency response, and accident or crime scene investigation. UAS operations are governed by strict privacy and use limitations, including adherence to FAA regulations, prohibitions on intentional recording in areas where a reasonable expectation of privacy exists absent a warrant or exigent circumstances, and requirements to take reasonable precautions to avoid inadvertent collection of such imagery. UAS use is further limited to clearly defined purposes—documenting evidence of violations or crimes, investigating accidents or crime scenes, conducting search and rescue missions, and authorized training—and is expressly prohibited for random or generalized surveillance, discriminatory targeting, harassment, personal use, or monitoring activities protected by the U.S. Constitution.

Together, these controls ensure that UAS use by conservation law enforcement agencies is narrowly tailored, transparent, and consistent with constitutional protections, while preserving a vital capability for protecting public safety and natural resources.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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The UAS platforms have proven highly effective in advancing key cases. As documented in the [2025 NRP UAS Team Annual Report](#), the Maryland Natural Resources Police UAS Team completed 953 missions totaling 778 hours and 11 minutes of actual flight time throughout the year.

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## **BILL EXPLANATION**

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House Bill 471 ensures that certain evidence obtained through the use of an unmanned aircraft is inadmissible in a criminal, civil, or administrative proceeding; prohibiting a unit of State government or a political subdivision of the State from deploying or operating an unmanned aircraft subject to certain exceptions; prohibiting a unit of State government or a political subdivision of the State from using certain information acquired through the use of an unmanned aircraft; and generally relating to the use of unmanned aircraft by the State and by local governments.