



Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

cc: Members, Ways and Means Committee

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Forever Maryland, we write to share information pertaining to **House Bill 1213 – State Transfer Tax – Rate – Alterations 2 (Housing Affordability for Buyers and Sellers)**.

Forever Maryland is the statewide coalition representing nearly 30 land trusts and land conservation organizations. Land trusts work in every region of the state to conserve farms, forests, waterways, wildlife habitat, and culturally significant landscapes in collaboration with state and local government and a wide variety of other conservation nonprofits.

Enacted in 1969, Maryland's transfer tax, a small tax on real estate transactions, was the nation's first dedicated funding source for land conservation. The ½% transfer tax funds the purchase and development of state and local parkland, the protection of farmland through voluntary conservation easements, the purchase and protection of valuable ecological land, supports Heritage Areas, and works to provide young farmers with access to land. This model has made Maryland a national land preservation leader.

Without a fiscal analysis, Forever Maryland is unable to ascertain whether the alterations proposed in HB1213 will result in changes to projected future transfer tax revenue. Maryland's land trusts do not have a position on modifying the tax to be progressive other than urging the committee to ensure that such modification does not adversely impact the overall revenue amount.

Land preservation is not only an environmental priority — it is a vital economic development strategy for Maryland. Protected farms, forests, and open spaces bolster agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, tourism, and small businesses that form the backbone of rural economies across Maryland. These lands also provide critical public benefits, including clean drinking water, flood mitigation, reduced infrastructure costs, and essential public parks.

Land preservation is also essential to achieving the State's broader conservation and climate goals. Preserved lands store carbon, increase climate resilience, protect biodiversity, and help maintain connected natural landscapes. Maryland has committed, through **Maryland the Beautiful**, to conserving 40% of the State's land by 2040. Stable, predictable funding is the linchpin to achieving this goal.

Maryland’s land conservation programs – Program Open Space, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, Rural Legacy, Greenspace Equity - depend on dedicated and reliable state transfer tax funding.

Forever Maryland and the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the Committee to consider the fiscal impact of HB1213 before rendering a report. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership on behalf of Maryland’s communities, landscapes, and future generations.

Forever Maryland member organizations

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| American Chestnut Land Trust | Land Trust Alliance |
| Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition | Land Preservation Trust |
| Baltimore Green Space | Long Green Land Trust |
| Casey Trees | Lower Shore Land Trust |
| Catoctin Land Trust | Magothy River Land Trust |
| Cecil Land Trust | NeighborSpace of Baltimore County |
| Chesapeake Conservancy | Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust |
| Conservancy For Charles County | Potomac Conservancy |
| Crownsville Conservancy | Rockburn Land Trust |
| Eastern Shore Land Conservancy | Scenic Rivers Land Trust |
| Green Trust Alliance | The Manor Conservancy |
| Gunpowder Valley Conservancy | The Nature Conservancy Maryland/DC |
| Harford Land Trust | Trust For Public Land |
| Howard County Conservancy | The Conservation Fund |