



Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

cc: Members, House Ways and Means Committee

Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Forever Maryland, we write in **opposition of House Bill 790 – State Transfer Tax - Exemption for First-Time Home Buyers – Alterations.**

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, known as Program Open Space, has made Maryland a national land preservation leader.

While Forever Maryland appreciates the bill's intent to lessen the tax burden on first-time home buyers; we must strongly urge the Committee to **reject any bills that will result in a reduction of the real estate transfer tax revenues** as this will directly result in less land preserved in Maryland.

Land conservation has never been a higher priority. Program Open Space, Rural Legacy, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, Heritage Areas, these funding streams protect more than just land, they protect food production, healthy creeks and rivers, our treasured wildlife, cultural heritage, biodiversity, and the outdoor economy. These programs protect the land, yes, and they also protect the quality of life and the livelihood of the people on that land.

Program Open Space has been consistently and repeatedly targeted for diversions and reductions for well over 20 years. In 2025, the General Assembly diverted \$25 million each year for four years from the transfer tax land conservation programs. Any cuts to the programs will

directly impact Maryland's goal of preserving 40% of our farms, forests and open space by 2040 thereby causing harm to the economy and overall well-being of Maryland.

As such, Forever Maryland and the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the Committee to issue an **unfavorable report on HB 790**. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership on behalf of Maryland's communities, landscapes, and future generations.

Sincerely,



Kristin Kirkwood
Forever Maryland, Board Chair
Harford Land Trust, Executive Director

Forever Maryland member organizations

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
Harford Land Trust	Trust For Public Land
Howard County Conservancy	The Conservation Fund