



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, I write to express strong opposition to **House Bill 1398 – State Transfer Tax - Temporary Suspension**.

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.

Maryland's land trusts agree that consistent diversions away from the state real estate transfer tax only serve to undermine land conservation efforts. But suspending the tax does not solve this problem, it only risks terminating land preservation efforts indefinitely.

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.

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.

The state transfer tax is not an impediment to first time homebuyers as they are exempt from this tax.

The purchase of conservation easements from private landowners is a one-time public investment that protects land and keeps ownership in private hands. This mechanism has proven to be a tremendously successful incentive to private landowners to voluntarily conserve their land and receive income tax, real estate tax and compensation for that decision. The Federal Government recognizes land conservation as a public benefit, which is why there is a charitable contribution recognized for such transactions.

The public has repeatedly confirmed their bipartisan support for land conservation since 1969. Land preservation has historically been and should remain one of the only truly bipartisan issues in the legislature.

Land preservation 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.

Forever Maryland and the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report of HB1398. 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 |