



THE CONSERVATION FUND

March 29, 2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair, and Members
Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee
The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chair, and Members
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building Rm 251
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0737 The Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act of 2021

Dear Chair Barve, Chair McIntosh and Committee Members:

We write in support of SB0737 and to encourage the legislature to pass this important piece of legislation this year.

SB0737, the Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act, is a win for Maryland's efforts to halt climate change, build community climate resilience, achieve critical Chesapeake Bay water quality goals, protect and restore forests, and address environmental justice priorities.

The Senate-passed bill has a few important provisions that we want to highlight.

The bill would make Maryland the first state in the country to establish a definition of 'blue infrastructure' that allows stronger prioritization of the kinds of environmental benefits that oyster restoration or other aquatic habitat can provide for carbon sequestration, nutrient removal, and climate resilience.

The bill captures lessons learned by other states on the use of the State Revolving Loan programs for water infrastructure, making them more useful for forest protection and management, more useful to support green infrastructure including tree planting, and better focused on environmental justice concerns like toxic lead water pipe replacement.

The bill would make Maryland the first state in the country to bring a definition of 'environmental outcome' into its procurement code and to create contracting authority to buy successful projects that deliver environmental outcomes. This language could be a game-changer for carbon sequestration, water quality programs, and a diversity of the state's ongoing compliance programs. For example, USDA is talking about defining carbon as a commodity eligible for support through the enormous federal Commodity Credit Corporation. This change, if enacted, gives Maryland a jump start on eligibility for any new federal effort.

Many of these and other changes will also expand private investment in Maryland conservation efforts. Many aspects of conservation like wetland restoration, sustainable forest management, and voluntary carbon market offsets are already significant areas for billions in private investment to meet the needs of for-profit businesses for offsets and corporate sustainability. The changes in the bill make it more likely that private investment and jobs it supports will flow into Maryland to green our economy while benefiting our ecosystems.

While the changes proposed in the bill are individually modest, we believe they are likely to significantly increase private investment in conservation in Maryland without requiring any state spending. In fact, we believe the procurement provisions in the bill regarding Pay-for-Success contracting are likely to help make future conservation projects more cost-effective, allowing the state to achieve more for every dollar spent.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Joel Dunn
Executive Director
Chesapeake Conservancy

Timothy Male
Executive Director
Environmental Policy Innovation Center

Mark Rupp
Director, State-Federal Policy and Affairs
Environmental Defense Fund

Bill Crouch
Maryland Director
The Conservation Fund

Kate Fritz
CEO
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

cc:

Vice Chair Dana M. Stein, Environment and Transportation Committee

Vice Chair Mark S. Chang, Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee Chair Marc A. Korman, Transportation and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee