

**Statement by National Parks Conservation Association in Support of HB 485
Regarding “Public-Private Partnerships - Process and Oversight”
Before the Environment and Transportation Committee
February 9, 2021
Kyle Hart, Mid-Atlantic Field Representative**

Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the support of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) for House Bill 485. We comment today on behalf of our 28,398 members and supporters in Maryland. The National Parks Conservation Association is the only national membership organization dedicated to advocacy of behalf of our country’s national parks. NPCA’s mission is to protect and enhance America's National Park System for present and future generations, a mission we have upheld since NPCA was created by the very first National Park Service Director, Stephen Mather, in 1919. Maryland is fortunate to be home to 18 national park sites, visited yearly by almost 7 million people and contributing to over \$300 million in economic benefit to the state.

The bill before you today would provide the General Assembly a much-needed oversight role over future public-private partnership (P3) projects. As shown by the P3 concerns regarding the construction of the Purple Line, as well as the ongoing concerns surrounding the P3 negotiations for the expansion of Interstates 495 and 270, this oversight is desperately needed for these types of projects.

HB 485 would require disclosure of financial and environmental information on all P3 projects, provide enhanced oversight for P3 projects that have a value exceeding \$500 million, and allow the General Assembly to nullify the P3 designation of projects should that need arise. It would also protect local governments by prohibiting contractual provisions that would allow toll companies to demand compensation when a road or transit project funded by a local government would reduce the number of drivers on toll lanes. This is similar to an existing prohibition applying to projects funded by the State. These reforms are necessary to protect Maryland taxpayers and commuters from bad projects pushed by private corporations and special interest groups.

In the case of the I-495/I-270 project, the absence of oversight has allowed the Maryland Department of Transportation to hide critical information from policymakers, denying the public a voice in shaping decisions about the project. This bill would increase transparency to ensure that legislators, local planners and the public have information they need to understand the impact of future projects. Since P3 projects are trumpeted by private corporations, profits often take precedent over preserving natural resources. This has been exceptionally clear in the I-495 P3 proposal. Over 100 acres of National Parkland, 1,500 acres of forest canopy, and 30 miles of streams would be harmed by this disastrous project. It is time for the Maryland General Assembly to take the reins on P3 proposals and protect Maryland taxpayers and the environment from harmful transportation projects in the future.

NPCA urges the Committee to report House Bill 485 favorably. Thank you.