



**Senate Bill 414 (Senator Pinsky) – Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021  
Heard in the House  
Written Testimony**

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**Date: March 31, 2021**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Submitted to: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Submitted by: Jana Davis, Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Trust

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust welcomes the role we have been called upon to fill in SB 414: to administer an urban tree planting grant program. The Trust is a grant-making organization established by the General Assembly in 1985 for precisely this purpose, to provide resources to local and community groups on the ground, and administers/has administered other similar programs, such as the Urban Greening Program and the Green Streets, Green Jobs, Green Towns Initiative, a partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

The Trust manages funds from various General Assembly-created sources, such as the Chesapeake vehicle license plate program, as well as funds from federal, state, and local government sources. For example, we administer grant programs with and for Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, Montgomery County, Anne Arundel County, Howard County, Harford County, Charles County, and many other state and local government partners.



Our model is to work with local community groups to understand what they want for their communities, then provide them resources for activities they themselves request and to which they demonstrate commitment. Communities who want the projects implemented in their communities and “own” them will sustain them for longer periods.

Tree planting is strongly desired and frequently requested by many of our applicant communities. The reason: Tree planting in all communities - urban, suburban, and rural - has multiple positive impacts, and communities recognize these co-benefits:

Economic/Energy: Trees have economic benefits, reducing energy costs by providing shade

Economic/Commercial: Studies show that the aesthetic value of trees in business districts can increase revenue.

Livability: The shade provided by trees counters heat island effects in urban areas, and recent studies show a drop in crime in greened neighborhoods.

Physical and Mental Health: Trees and other green spaces, both urban and non-urban, have been shown to improve physical and mental human health<sup>1234</sup>. Improved health leads to longer lifespans and

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<sup>1</sup> Wolf KL, Robbins AS. 2015. Metro nature, environmental health, and economic value. Environ Health Perspect 123:390–398; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1408216>

lower medical costs through preventative means, top of mind for many in these times of COVID.

Urban greening projects may be one tool to combat health disparities in certain communities.

Climate: Trees are a sink for carbon dioxide, serving as a mitigation tool for climate change.

Water Quality: Trees uptake excess nutrients, serving as a water quality best management practice, so positive for local waters and the Chesapeake Bay.

Flooding: Trees uptake water, contributing to reduction of flood risk (Figure 1).

Habitat: Trees provide habitat to many other species.

The economic return from health benefits alone as a result of greening projects have been shown in some models to exceed costs to implement them, creating a significant return on investment. We will explore whether other benefits listed above, such as carbon credits, can be used to supplement the revenue stream for these tree projects.



Figure 1: Impact of street tree planter boxes on flooding. Prior to this Chesapeake Bay Trust-funded urban greening grant, local business basements flooded. After the project, businesses report no basement flooding.

Over the past 35 years, the Trust has funded over 14,000 community-based projects worth over \$130 million that leveraged over \$100 million more. In the past, Trust-supported projects ranged from less than \$100 to over \$800,000, though there is no limit on either end. We tailor grant size to grantee capacity.

Over the past 5 years, the Trust has funded (with about 25 other funding partners who aggregate funds at the Trust for distribution, including Baltimore City, Prince Georges County, Montgomery County, Anne Arundel County, Harford County, Howard County, Charles County, City of Salisbury, City of Gaithersburg, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, BGE, and more) **298 tree planting projects** led by over 200 unique entities through grants to communities and schools. Those projects planted **140,133 trees total, 20,555 in underserved** areas, averaging \$264 per tree in underserved areas. The 298 projects were funded at **\$16.2m** (\$5.4 million in underserved areas).

Businesses benefit as well: Approximately half of the funds from these awards were distributed to local businesses, such as nurseries to supply trees and contractors to plant them. Additional jobs at nonprofit

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<sup>2</sup> South et al., 2018, Effect of Greening Vacant Land on Mental Health of Community-Dwelling Adults: A Cluster Randomized Trial. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2018;1(3):e180298. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.0298

<sup>3</sup> White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. et al. 2019. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Sci Rep* 9, 7730. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>

<sup>4</sup> Spending Just 20 Minutes in a Park Makes You Happier. Here's What Else Being Outside Can Do for Your Health. 2019. *Time* magazine <https://time.com/5539942/green-space-health-wellness/>.

entities are supported, and a total of **62,386 total people** were involved in the projects (volunteers, teachers, students), with **26,322 people of color** (42%).

The Trust can support only about a third of grant requests due to current funding levels, and outreach is tempered to available funding. We anticipate, therefore, that should more resources be available, more communities would access them.

The demand is there: About 100 local jurisdictions or communities across Maryland, from Cumberland to Cambridge and many in between, have either been working on or adopted tree canopy goals and have supported neighborhood nonprofits within them to help accomplish those goals. These urban tree canopy goals call for thousands of acres of additional trees to be planted: In Baltimore City alone, increasing from current levels of 28% to the 40% goal means an additional approximately 2400 acres are needed.<sup>5</sup> Cumberland had 1200 acres of tree canopy in the urbanized area at last assessment, and had identified another 2000 urban acres where tree canopy could be planted<sup>6</sup>.

We believe that capacity of organizations will quickly grow to match the goals outlined in the bill.

The science of implementing tree canopy projects exists: Various programs at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources<sup>7</sup> and the EPA-coordinated Chesapeake Bay Program<sup>8</sup> offer guidelines for implementing tree canopy goals.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the Committee. If you should have any questions regarding the Trust or the Trust's testimony, please contact me 410-974-2941 x100 or [jdavis@cbtrust.org](mailto:jdavis@cbtrust.org).

### **About the Chesapeake Bay Trust**

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a non-profit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and citizen engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays. The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work and reach large numbers of groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting 92 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$120 million through more than 12,000 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985. We make 350-400 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation, and instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two new donation options through Maryland's online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/forestry/treebaltimore/canopy>; <https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/news/release/Baltimore-tree-canopy>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel\\_files/22153/cb\\_utc\\_goals-progress.pdf](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/22153/cb_utc_goals-progress.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/programs/urban/treecanopygoals.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/3b\\_Urban\\_Tree\\_Canopy\\_final.pdf](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/3b_Urban_Tree_Canopy_final.pdf);  
[https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/UTC\\_Guide\\_Final.pdf](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/UTC_Guide_Final.pdf)

The types of projects supported by the Trust include urban tree plantings, stream and park clean-ups, wetlands restoration, living shorelines, oyster seeding, local stream water quality monitoring, and outdoor educational experiences for children and adults. The Trust's programs reach about 80,000 K-12 students and 20,000 adult volunteers each year across the state. Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for fourteen years, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenants in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources. Three under-engaged audiences of particular focus identified by our Diversity and Inclusion Committee are the faith-based sector, communities of color, and the human health sector. The Trust has seen much success: Over the past five years, the number of students, volunteers, and teachers of color match the demographics of Maryland. Close to 10% of our grants supported work at faith-based institutions of 13 different religions. We make grants for work at hospitals and other human health centers, but would like to do more. The funds generated from the program created in this bill will continue to support work with under-engaged audiences.