



February 28, 2022

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Maryland the Beautiful Act (HB 1031 / SB 791) SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Dear Chairman Barve and Vice Chairman Stein:

I am writing in support of the Maryland the Beautiful Act *with amendments*. This bill addresses a structural inequity in the Program Open Space funding and conservation funding available at the state level. This funding has historically been inaccessible to smaller land trusts.

Program Open Space Local funding is distributed directly to county & city governments and Program Open Space Stateside requires a minimum acreage of 5 acres for a land trust to be eligible. Additionally, the Rural Legacy Program is available only to rural land trusts and municipalities for land acquisition. While the programs as they exist are powerful conservation tools to be celebrated, there is nothing comparable for urban or populated areas where green lots available have a smaller acreage footprint, green spaces are in high demand, dwindling, and even more essential for local climate resilience.

In 2020, sixteen Baltimore residents died because of extreme heat. Hundreds ended up in the hospital. Heat waves also led to poorer air quality, which means that people with asthma and other respiratory problems had a harder time breathing. Baltimore also struggles with significant flooding. Runoff overloads sewage treatment plants and polluted waterways.

Baltimore City currently has over 1,000 green spaces where neighbors tend abandoned lots creating green spaces for their communities. These communities though not all, are often in historically redlined areas. Without more conservation these spaces are vulnerable to development and increased vulnerability to worsening climate change. Baltimore Green Space, a land trust for community green space, protects 16 spaces totaling 7.2 acres in Baltimore's City limits. None of these protected spaces hits the 5-acre mark required by the current state conservation programs. Each green space, protected in the trust or not, is crucial to the surrounding neighborhood.

For 15 years Baltimore Green Space has existed to assist community members interested in preserving their green spaces. We know that the likelihood of a space remaining a benefit to



the community sustained over time requires community support and trusted partnership with local organizations. Our preservation process requires participation from a community partner and is vetted with the Baltimore City Planning Department and the Department of Housing and Community Development as required by Baltimore City's Policy for Preserving Community Managed Open Space. Currently none of the state conservation programs require defined equity measures be met, has a community related advisory committee, or require formal input from community leaders as to the need the conservation projects may serve. The Green Space Equity Program will be an opportunity to course correct.

Subtitle 9D. refers to the Greenspace Equity Program. Its mirror program, The Rural Legacy Program received 26 million dollars in 2021. In the interest of a more equitable beginning, we hope you will support the amendment to propose the Green Space Equity Program begin with 5 million in funding in its first year and 10 million in the second year and each year thereafter.

Additionally, the Greenspace Equity Program's Equity Board doesn't seem to have any leaders of color represented, and seems to have few members whose primary work requires they be grounded in deep knowledge of underserved communities, or equity issues. We recommend this Board be amended and/or complimented by an advisory board that might deepen the goals of equitable implementation and expand understanding of unreserved community needs in the conservation community.

Finally there are areas throughout Maryland that have been affected by various inequities and the definition currently outlined in this bill should be broadened to expand beyond historically redlined communities. The Center for Disease Control has created a map of Socially Vulnerable Communities. We encourage you to examine that map here: <https://chescon.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=b91f828f3ccf4fb7a21a39050ddee5be>.

For a list of local land trusts that would be able to make use of these funds to address equity issues follow this link https://dnr.maryland.gov/met/Documents/Land_Trust_Directory.pdf.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to the greater good through your work.

Sincerely,

Katie Lautar, Executive Director