



Hearing before the House Committee on Environment and Transportation
Maryland General Assembly
March 2, 2022

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
HB 1031, Maryland the Beautiful Act**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based on, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation. MCCH is a voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics, but should be distinguished from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for passage of House Bill 1031, the Maryland the Beautiful Act. As Catholics, we see care for God's creation as an integral part of our faith. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home** contains an entire chapter, "The Gospel of Creation," that highlights the ways in which the natural world is a channel for experiencing God: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine." (p.85) Pope Francis decries the loss of landscapes that are integral to biodiversity, framing it in terms of both intergenerational justice and spirituality: "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us." (p.33) He also notes the disparity in which underserved communities, in particular, lack "access to places of particular beauty": "Frequently, we find beautiful and carefully manicured green spaces in so-called 'safer' areas of cities, but not in the more hidden areas where the disposable of society live." (p.45) For these reasons he states that "in both urban and rural settings, it is helpful to set aside some places which can be preserved and protected from constant changes brought by human intervention." (p.151)

House Bill 1031 contains provisions that are responsive to all of these themes of Pope Francis's teachings. It sets statewide goals for conservation that ensure that, as Maryland continues to grow and develop, it also continues to preserve and protect open space for nature and for the enjoyment of people now and into the future. It creates a "Greenspace Equity Program" that specifically enables greenspace projects in underserved communities. And it provides for permanent funding for incentives to promote the stewardship of privately owned forestland in Maryland—lands that provide essential habitat for the wildlife and birds that are crucial to the integrity of Maryland ecosystems. By engaging the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, House Bill 1031 encourages cooperation and solidarity in its efforts to promote the conservation of Maryland's natural resources and the preservation of healthy ecosystems for the benefit of all Marylanders.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on House Bill 1031.

* The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the following parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_eniclica-laudato-si.html.