



Testimony encouraging a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 631 – Natural Resources – Land Conservation – Establishment of Goals and Programs

Maryland the Beautiful Act

Environment and Transportation Committee
February 22, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF HB631**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

Preserving natural lands is one of the best tools we have in protecting our local water quality. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the conservation of natural lands maintains the water cycle, minimizes pollutant runoff, and prevents the loss of natural lands to more environmentally damaging development or land use practices.¹ Maryland the Beautiful Act, also known as the 40x40 Act, would mandate a conservation goal of 40% of Maryland lands by 2040. Additionally, it will create a \$10 million Rapid Response Revolving Loan Fund to help small and medium sized land trusts preserve critical lands, which will allocate grant funding towards land trusts and community nonprofits. This directly supports our mission of achieving clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways.

We have witnessed multiple instances in Anne Arundel County where local non-profits and land trusts have expressed interest in purchasing largely forested, agricultural, or open space lands for sale. Often, these small organizations have not had the financial support to competitively act, resulting in natural filter lands being lost to development. Anne Arundel County has experienced some of the largest extent of intact forest converted to developed land between 2013-2018, with over 2,500 acres of forest lost.² **Our waterways are polluted with excess nutrient and sediment pollution. Making the commitment to preserve 40% of Maryland lands by 2040 and supporting our local land trust to meet this goal will make a direct impact on our home waterways, which ultimately support our economy, ecosystems, and way of life in Maryland.**

Arundel Rivers Federation encourages the conservation of our natural lands to benefit our local habitats and water quality when possible, and respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE REPORT on HB631**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

¹ EPA. Advancing Watershed Protection Through Land Conservation. 2022. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-08/Advancing_Watershed_Protection_Through_Land_Conservation_EPA_July_2022.pdf

² Technical Study on Changes in Forest Cover and Tree Canopy in Maryland. 2022. https://agmr.umd.edu/technical_study-changes-forest-cover-and-tree-canopy-maryland.