



SB526 – Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention

Testimony before

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 2, 2023

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mdm. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **support of SB526**, which would alter the meaning of “qualified conservation” and establish and add different methods for afforestation, reforestation, and preservation requirements. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We appreciate the leadership of Senator Elfreth in sponsoring this important legislation.

Forests are a necessity. They prevent erosion, enrich and conserve soil, lessen flooding impacts and decrease the risk of diseases. They are the second-largest holder of carbon after the oceans. Spending time in forests provides physical and mental health benefits for people. They also preserve essential habitat for native plants and animals, which helps ensure biodiversity. This bill will ensure that we preserve and grow the forests that we currently have in Maryland. It will require that each acre of forest cleared be reforested at a ratio of 1 to 1, except existing priority cover, which will require reforestation at a 2 to 1 ratio. It also allows local jurisdictions to develop and propose alternative plans for afforestation, reforestation, and preservation, which will help different areas be nimble with their preservation.

For these reasons, we support SB526.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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