



HB631 –Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Testimony before House Environment & Transportation Committee

February 22, 2023

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Crystal Konny, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today in support of HB631 Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act). We appreciate the leadership of Delegate Stein for sponsoring this important legislation.

The bill sets a goal to conserve 30% of Maryland lands by 2030 and 40% by 2040, and creates several new categories of funding to permanently protect cultural, historical, ecological, and agricultural lands from development. It establishes a \$10 million Revolving Loan Fund to enable small and medium-sized Land Trusts to preserve critical lands quickly. The bill also creates grant programs to support land trusts and community nonprofits for improving the stewardship and health of lands.

Land conservation is a very simple defense to the challenge of climate change and sea-level rise as it offers carbon sequestration and lessens flooding impacts. It preserves essential habitat for native plants and animals which helps ensure biodiversity and mitigate the unprecedented species loss we've been seeing in the past several years. One million species are at risk of extinction worldwide. In the last 40 years, wildlife populations have declined by 60 percent. Land conservation will help stop species loss.

Natural areas and parks are indispensable to people's physical and mental health and enjoyment. This bill will provide space for people and wildlife to thrive. In the last half of the century, Maryland lost an estimated 7,200 acres of forest land per year. Let's set a goal to reverse that.

We urge you to pass the Maryland the Beautiful Act. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. **We respectfully urge a favorable committee report.**

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