



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

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Date: February 27, 2023

Bill Number: **SB 181 – Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2024)**

Committee: Senate – Budget & Tax – Capital Budget Sub Committee

Position: Support

Forever Maryland supports **SB 181 – Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2024)** for the purpose of continuing to support Maryland’s Program Open Space and all it does for investment in parks, habitat conservation, local foods & agricultural land conservation, historic preservation, and more.

Forever Maryland supports the Administration’s proposed FY24 state budget for funding of Program Open Space. As proposed by Governor Moore, the Budget sets aside \$169 million for Program Open Space funding, including more than \$75 million for state projects/purposes and \$89 million available for “local side” projects.

Forever Maryland was happy to see nearly \$28 million allocated towards the Rural Legacy program and more than \$5 million paid back from previous diversions, for a total of more than \$33 million. The Rural Legacy program helps landowners – including Maryland farmers – protect their lands if the land resides within a locally determined Rural Legacy Area. Among other benefits, these easements have helped with climate resiliency, keeping vital forest lands intact, and helping pass the family farm down to the next generation while adding greater water quality benefits. This budget also fully funds the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) and the nearly \$95 million towards preservation projects.

Thank you all for what you continue to do to support local foods, habitat protection, space for mental and physical wellness, climate resiliency, improved water quality and the numerous other benefits of land conservation. If further information is requested, please contact the organization’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or Josh@ForeverMaryland.org.

We respectfully request a favorable report.

FOREVER MARYLAND

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