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MARYLAND

*Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation*

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**Date:** February 28, 2022  
**Bill Number:** **SB 290 – Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2023)**  
**Committee:** Senate – Budget & Tax Committee  
**Position:** Support

Forever Maryland supports **SB 290 – Budget Bill (Fiscal Year 2023)** 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 FY23 state budget for funding of Program Open Space.** As proposed by Governor Hogan, the Budget sets aside \$144,762,040 for the state share of Program Open Space projects/purposes and \$77,050,266 available for local government programs.

Forever Maryland was happy to see the proposed repayment of \$30,496,725 of prior year diverted Program Open Space funds. This repayment is a step in the right direction and leaves more than \$130 million still owed to the program.

Had diverted funds gone to the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), as allocated by the Program Open Space formula, 3,600 acres of permanently conserved farmland would have continued to indefinitely support the local food economy and agricultural resilience. Furthermore, Maryland’s local land trusts, which strongly utilize the Rural Legacy program, would have likely preserved 1,000 additional acres.

Failure to fully fund State Side Program Open Space will have a negative impact on the acquisition of additional parkland at a time when the demand is higher than ever. Over the last two years, attendance records were shattered throughout Maryland’s network of local and state parks. Acquiring additional parkland and meeting critical maintenance needs is essential to meeting current demands.

Forever Maryland promotes and supports the land and water conservation community, through education, advocacy, and outreach, to permanently protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems for all. If further information is requested, please contact the organization’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or [Josh@ForeverMaryland.org](mailto:Josh@ForeverMaryland.org).

We respectfully request a favorable report.

**FOREVER MARYLAND**

2331 Rock Spring Road | Forest Hill, MD 21050 | 410-251-5268 | [www.ForeverMaryland.org](http://www.ForeverMaryland.org)