



Date: February 26, 2024

Committee: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 0530

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Korman and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

The undersigned organizations support House Bill 0530 – Great Maryland Trails Act. This bill will establish the Maryland Office of Trails in the Department of Transportation to develop and maintain the Maryland Trails Network.

Trails bring many benefits to any community from public health, economic development, tourism, equitable active transportation, to access to parks, schools, and open space. In the updated Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans (2022) residents on the Eastern Shore and throughout the state ranked more and longer trails as their most valued recreational asset.

In the recently updated 2050 State Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan, MDOT noted several areas of the Eastern Shore as lacking in pedestrian infrastructure and identified areas that would benefit from improved bicycle infrastructure. Maryland's Eastern Shore counties and municipalities often lack the staff resources needed to apply for and manage federal grants and many areas are not part of an MPO that could assist with these efforts. Neighboring Eastern Shore areas have recently received major federal awards for projects led by the state Departments of Transportation in Virginia (\$23 Million for Eastern Shore Rail Trail) and Delaware (\$21 Million for Georgetown to Lewes Trail).

A state office of trails focused on the development of regional trails projects would have positive impacts on the economy, community, and individual health and wellness.

An interconnected regional trail network would be a force multiplier as each trail system connected to the wider network would enjoy increased value. Trails encourage physical activity and healthy lifestyles. They create safe alternative transportation and equitable access to jobs and daily needs. They expand greenspaces and wildlife corridors and can help preserve the rural character of our communities.

We respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 0530.

Sincerely,

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and the following organizations:

**Catoctin Land Trust**

David Lillard, Executive Director

**Eastern Shore Trail Network Steering Committee**

Owen Bailey, Chair

**Forever Maryland**

Josh Hastings, Executive Director

**Talbot Thrive**

Heather Grant, Executive Director

**Worcester County Bike and Pedestrian Coalition**

Patti Stevens, Co-Founder and Chair

