



## House Bill 458

### *Program Open Space - Local Projects - Visitor Behavior Policies*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Environment and Transportation  
Committee

Date: February 3, 2021

From: Alex Butler

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 458 as it needlessly injects a State mandate into local jurisdictions' practice to promote ethical behavior for visitors to parks and natural areas. The bill requires compliance in order for jurisdictions' residents to benefit from the State's centerpiece land acquisition and preservation effort, Program Open Space.

The creation of a new and prescriptive policy would be burdensome for parks and recreation departments, and duplicative of other efforts at the local level. Under the bill, if local government does not submit a sufficient policy to the Department of Natural Resources, they are not able to access funding from Program Open Space – thereby depriving residents of important recreational and educational activities supported by their own tax dollars. Counties, of course, already have a variety of local policies and procedures related to visitor behavior and maintaining the vibrancy and integrity of their parks and natural resources. These range from prohibitions on littering to forbidding dangerous behaviors to restrictions on interaction with wildlife – in each case reflecting community needs, and those dictated by the nature of the park or reserved area.

Adding another layer of policy, and its stark enforcement provisions, would not necessarily provide additional benefit to residents but would require local governments to divert time and resources they could otherwise prioritize for park management. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to provide an **UNFAVORABLE** report for HB 458.