



House Bill 735

Task Force on Forest Conservation in Maryland

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 22, 2019

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 735 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would establish a Task Force on Forest Conservation in Maryland.

The Task Force would be charged with: (1) mapping existing forest and tree canopy within the state; (2) identifying potential afforestation and reforestation locations; (3) analyzing forest health and quality; (4) analyzing observed and projected changes in forest coverage; and (5) making recommendations regarding the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) and No Net Loss of Forest Policy.

MACo supports the idea of a task force to review FCA and tree issues prior to proposing any statutory changes to the FCA or other tree programs. However, meaningful concerns over membership balance and scope prevented passage of such a task force in the 2017 and 2018 Sessions.

MACo believes that with some amendments to membership and scope, HB 735 would have MACo's support. It is critical for everyone to be operating with the same data and understanding of what is happening with Maryland's forests before making important and far-reaching policy decisions. However, MACo cannot support a bill that arbitrarily limits representation or review of valid data or leads to pre-determined outcomes.

The amendments offered by the NAIOP-MD are a reasonable starting point for discussion and MACo supports the Committee giving the bill's proponents and opponents some time to work through these amendments.

Assuming an agreement on amendments is reached, HB 735 can supply the data and information necessary to consider how Maryland's forest policies are faring. Accordingly, MACo requests the Committee give HB 735 a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**.