



House Bill 1118

Natural Resources – Roadside Trees – Preservation and Protection

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: March 1, 2017

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 1118. The bill would create a new permitting process for the maintenance and removal of trees, replacing the existing statutory and regulatory requirements established by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Under current law, a person who desires to maintain or remove a roadside tree must apply to DNR for a permit. Under the bill, DNR may grant a permit for the maintenance or removal of a roadside tree in extremely limited cases. The tree must be: (1) a hazard or danger to property, public safety, or health; or (2) dead, dying, or deteriorating. An applicant for a permit for a program of general tree care must also demonstrate to the satisfaction of DNR that the program includes reasonable standards and procedures to protect and preserve roadside trees.

While MACo does acknowledge concerns over private entities that engage in significant roadside tree maintenance and cutting, such as utilities, MACo questions whether the new permitting requirements proposed by the bill are necessary. DNR already has extensive and longstanding regulations in place that govern tree care. The bill would adversely affect local government tree programs, which actively work to protect the public while maintaining a robust tree canopy, particularly in urban and suburban areas. As the bill's fiscal note indicates, costs may also increase for tree replacements where it may not be viable or practical to normally replace a tree that must be removed.

HB 1118 would make significant changes to DNR's existing tree care requirements and create new administrative and cost burdens for county governments. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report for HB 1118.