

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Written testimony for Bill 25-22 - Forest Conservation Trees  
Council hearing on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <sup>1</sup>**

Denisse Guitarra, MD Conservation Advocate  
Nature Forward



Dear Montgomery County Council,

Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) is the oldest independent environmental organization in the DC metro region. Our mission is to inspire residents of the greater Washington, DC, region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education, and advocacy. We thank the County Council for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill 25-22 which seeks to update the county's current forest conservation law.

The recently released Hughes Center Report on Maryland's Forests found that "Montgomery and Prince George's counties accounted for more than 44% of the state's total tree canopy loss."<sup>2</sup> We are rapidly losing our most precious natural land healers, our forests. Forests are critical natural infrastructure that has multiple co-benefits. Forests purify our air, water, reduce urban heat, serve as habitats for wildlife, reduce stormwater run-off, reduce stress levels, connect communities, and do so much more. The time to take action and save our forests is now.

After more than three years of conversations with Planning staff, environmental community, and community members, we, as a member of the Montgomery County Forest Coalition, are confident that the proposed legislation as we have reviewed it to date will improve the conditions of our county's forests. The current proposed amendments strengthen the existing Forest Conservation Law, and we are pleased to support them. For example, the new amendments set higher expectations for preserving forest on development sites by prioritizing replanting in the same watershed and increasing the replanting ratios.

The following are additional recommendations we would like Council to consider while reviewing and proceeding with Bill 25-22:

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<sup>1</sup> Bill 25-22 Forest Conservation -Trees. Available at:  
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/calendar.html>

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Forest Technical Study. Nov 2022. Available at:  
<https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/mdforeststudy2022>



- **Approve Bill 25-22 now, do not delay this bill any longer, and do not weaken it further. Schedule a Transportation and Environment committee session soon after the full Council hearing.**
- **In future legislation: dedicate and establish a fund for controlling invasive plants and long-term tree maintenance.**

We are very pleased with the results of our partnership with Planning staff to recommend this legislation and hope that Council passes it soon. However, on its own, it still will not do enough to protect our forests because the jurisdiction of the Forest Conservation Law is limited to certain circumstances. For example, it does not protect street trees (under the jurisdiction of the Tree Canopy Law and DEP) or right-of-way trees (under the jurisdiction of the Roadside Tree Protection Law and MCDOT) and does not guarantee investments to maintain and improve the health of existing forest on County- or M-NCPPC-owned land. Over the coming years there will be more work to do to build on these needed improvements to the Forest Conservation Law.

Ultimately, our goal and the goal for the County should be to protect not just trees and patches of trees, but full, contiguous forest ecosystems. A full forest ecosystem includes healthy soil, drainage, healthy fungi in the soil, healthy micro-biotic communities in the soil, biomass; groundcover; shrub layer, tree understory layer; tree canopy layer, diversity of different types of trees and plants.

On behalf of Nature Forward and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the County Council supports and takes into consideration Montgomery County's Forest Coalitions recommendations and moves forward now on Bill 25-22 and does not delay any more. Protecting our forests now will help to continue to build, healthy, resilient communities for Montgomery County into the future.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra  
MD Conservation Advocate  
Nature Forward