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PRESS RELEASE

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Partners for Open Space Applauds Program Open Space Trust Fund Act of 2016***New Poll Cites Overwhelming Public Support for Program Open Space***

Bill Would Establish an "Open Space Trust Fund," Fully Fund Program Open Space by 2018 and Provides a Repayment Plan for Recent Diversions

Annapolis, MD – Today, Partners for Open Space applauds legislation sponsored by Senator Middleton, Delegate Gaines, the Maryland delegation of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and other key legislators that would establish a Program Open Space "Trust Fund," move to fully fund Program Open Space after years of raiding, and provide a repayment plan for recent diversions.

The Program Open Space Trust Fund Act of 2016 (SB 927 and HB 1464) is being proposed on the heels of a recent poll of Marylanders conducted by Partners for Open Space that showed 87% support for Program Open Space and 73% support for the Act. Support for the Program and the proposed Act was strong in all regions of Maryland and across party lines. Polling was conducted jointly by both republican and democratic polling firms. The polling memo is available [here](#).

The new bill responds to recommendations made by a workgroup, called for by legislators and led by the Department of Natural Resources, that examined land conservation programs funded by the real estate transfer tax. Workgroup members recommended that the program return to full cash funding by no later than 2018, and the bill responds by cancelling preauthorization to divert the programs' funds in 2018. The bill establishes a Program Open Space "Trust Fund" that could only be diverted if repayment is made from General Funds starting the year after the diversion, in one-third increments over the next three years.

The bill also requires repayment in full of funds diverted in 2016 and repayment of \$42 million that is being diverted this year for the 2017 budget.

Finally, the bill redirects repayment of \$90 million dollars that is statutorily owed to the POS programs from 2006 diversions, by allocating \$5 million to the Next

Generation Farmland Acquisition Program in the FY 2018 budget, \$45 million to Program Open Space in FY 2019, and beginning in FY 2019 it directs \$6 million per year to the Department of Natural Resources to supplement the state parks maintenance budget until a total of \$40 million is delivered.

Program Open Space funds land conservation, historic resource protection and park development across the state, for both state agencies as well as county governments and the City of Baltimore. Projects funded protect water quality and wildlife habitat, create new recreation opportunities, and protect farmland and historic sites. When asked about priorities for the funds, those surveyed overwhelmingly prioritized water quality efforts for drinking water, rivers, streams and Chesapeake Bay. Other key priorities include protection of forests and wildlife habitat, preserving farmland, maintaining and repairing state parks, and increasing access to the water, including beaches and the Chesapeake Bay.

“While the original Program Open Space Act of 1969 dedicated these funds to land preservation, for many years administrations and legislators have raided and diverted them for other purposes,” Josh Hastings, chair, Partners for Open Space, said. “Our coalition of more than 150 supporting members is very grateful to Senator Middleton, Delegate Gaines, the Maryland delegation of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and other key legislators for introducing this legislation which, if enacted will help protect future Program Open Space funds - and regain at least some of the previous diversions to be used for their intended purpose - creating parks and playgrounds and protecting farms, forest and historic places.”

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Partners for Open Space is a statewide coalition of over 100 groups seeking to secure, save and protect Maryland's land conservation programs.

www.partnersforopenspace.org

Established in 1969, Program Open Space dedicates a portion of the state's real estate transfer tax to support the preservation of parks, playgrounds, farms, forests and historic sites.