



## House Bill 717

*Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**  
**WITH AMENDMENTS**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: February 12, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson and Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 717 WITH AMENDMENTS** to ensure greater flexibility in the use of Program Open Space (POS) Local allocations. This bill allows flexibility for future allocations for POS funds if the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Planning certify that the acquisition goals have been met. Department-sought amendments will clarify the intended beneficial effects on local jurisdictions who have met State-set land preservation goals.

Since its inception in 1969, POS has enabled the State of Maryland and its counties to expand public access to recreational spaces and natural areas, delivering immense health and economic benefits to communities across the state. Over time, counties' ability to reach lofty land acquisition goals has been a variable, but those who have done so now require more resources for park maintenance and facility improvements. The current rigid allocation structure does not adequately address evolving needs, resulting in inefficiencies in fund utilization, especially given recent reductions in state funding due to declining transfer tax revenues.

HB 717 presents a valuable opportunity to modernize POS Local allocations by allowing counties to direct resources toward vital park enhancements, including upgrades to playgrounds, recreation centers, and other facilities, while maintaining appropriate oversight through the Department of Natural Resources and acreage-per-capita considerations.

Given the fiscal constraints facing local governments, county Recreation and Parks departments are striving to maximize the effects of limited resources through innovative and efficient solutions. Granting counties increased discretion in the use of POS Local funds will allow them to better meet the diverse recreational needs of their residents while ensuring responsible stewardship of public resources.

For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** on HB 717.

*(Amendment language on reverse side)*

DNR Amendments with MACo support:

On page 15, strike beginning with “provided” in line 26 down through “subtitle” in line 28; and in line 29, strike the opening bracket; and in the same line before “Except” insert an opening bracket.

On page 16, strike beginning with “its” in line 2 down through “renewal” in line 4 and substitute “**ITS:**

**A. APPORTIONMENT NOT YET ENCUMBERED AS OF JULY 1, 2025;**

**B. FISCAL YEAR 2026 APPORTIONMENT; AND**

**C. FUTURE ANNUAL APPORTIONMENT.**

**2. A LOCAL GOVERNING BODY MAY USE THE APPORTIONMENT IN SUBSUBPARAGRAPH 1 OF THIS SUBPARAGRAPH”;**

and after line 21, insert:

“(d) If land is donated to local governing bodies during the fiscal year, 75 percent of the appraised value the Department approves may be applied as a portion of, or all of, the local governing body's share of the project's cost for the projects referred to in [§ 5-904 of this subtitle] SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION.

“(e) If federal funds are received for any approved local project after it was funded by the State in accordance with [subsection] SUBSECTIONS (b) AND (C) of this section [or § 5-904 of this subtitle], the applicant shall reimburse the State in an amount equal to the federal contribution. The reimbursement shall be reserved for other projects approved for the applicant up to the limit of the share allocated to the local governing body.”.