

Statement of Scott J. Cameron,  
Vice Chairman and Legislative Committee Chairman  
Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District  
Supporting SB 316 by Senator Salim  
January 22, 2024

The mission of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District is to promote sustainable urban and suburban activities and stewardship to conserve our soil, water, air, plants, and animal resources in Fairfax County - vital components of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. We serve Fairfax County's 1.2 million residents and have a reimbursable agreement to assist the residents of Arlington County as well.

Trees are valuable natural resources that provide wildlife habitat, sequester carbon, facilitate stormwater management, beautify neighborhoods, and reduce urban and suburban heat islands that increase residential and commercial utility costs. In addition, Virginia is supposed to plant 48,000 acres of trees by 2025 to meet our commitment to the region under the latest Chesapeake Bay agreement, but as of a year ago we had only succeeded in planting about 7,000 acres of trees. At the same time, Virginia has lost in excess of 12,000 acres of forest over the last several years to industrial utility scale solar development. In other words, the Commonwealth is already in the hole with respect to tree coverage, and that does not even account for continuing suburban development, which often involves the loss of trees.

As a result, anything that the General Assembly can do to encourage a more rapid increase in tree cover in any of our communities is a valuable and welcome development. In this context, the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District is pleased to wholeheartedly support Senator Salim's SB 316 and urges its prompt passage.

Thank you for your consideration.