



April 1, 2026

The Honorable Abigail D. Spanberger
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Spanberger:

On behalf of the membership of Friends of Live Oaks, a community 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote, protect, preserve and plant live oaks – Virginia Beach’s official City tree – and other globally rare maritime forest plant species, we respectfully request that you sign HB 549 re: providing additional authority for localities to establish tree canopy goals and enabling localities in Virginia to adopt tree preservation ordinances. This permissive bill enables localities to set reasonable standards for establishing tree canopy goals and to adopt local ordinances promoting tree preservation, while in no way inhibiting the growth of the Commonwealth’s residential and business communities.

Virginia has lost thousands of acres of forest and urban and suburban tree canopy over the last decade. These losses make it harder for the Commonwealth to achieve its nutrient reduction goals outlined in Virginia’s Watershed Implementation Plan, the state’s blueprint to restore the Chesapeake Bay. While we cannot undo past deforestation, this bill will help to restore the health of our invaluable forest resources and other resources that depend on forests.

We cannot overstate the myriad of benefits that trees provide to Virginia. Forests filter our drinking water supplies and keep streams running clear; street trees reduce urban heat islands and heat-related ER visits in our cities. Existing trees capture carbon, reduce energy use and protect property and infrastructure from rising sea levels.

Looking beyond the environmental and health benefits, trees also provide economic benefits to the Commonwealth. Virginia continues to lose tree canopy at an astonishing rate, losing more than 50,000 acres of tree canopy in the last seven years. This loss of tree canopy, particularly in urban and suburban localities, hinders Virginia’s efforts to manage stormwater, flooding, and mitigate against the most harmful effects of climate change. Of the amount of forest and urban trees lost each year, roughly 10% became impervious surfaces—increasing stormwater runoff and amplifying the heat island effect. Trees also can boost local economies and property values by creating more attractive retail locations and residential communities - and Virginia’s nursery industry will see increased tree and landscape supply sales with the passage of HB549.

This bill has had widespread and bipartisan support in the General Assembly. Additionally, Fairfax County adopted its ordinances under the statute provided in HB1100 in 2009 – and their tree ordinances have neither hindered development nor reduced the availability of affordable housing.

The Commonwealth has an opportunity to become a national leader in achieving a smart balance between continued growth and reforestation that can provide prosperity for all. For the benefit of all Virginia families and businesses, we urge you to sign HB 549 into law.

Respectfully,

HC Bernick, III
Executive Director