

Testimony of
Anne Lewis, FAIA
President, City Wildlife, Inc.
in support of the
Maryland Bird-Safe Buildings Act - HB 192, SB 299
MD General Assembly
Tuesday, February 11, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Anne Lewis, and I am President of City Wildlife, a non-profit organization in the District of Columbia whose mission is to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat. I am also an architect. We run the *Lights Out DC* program, a program to study bird/glass collisions in downtown DC. Since 2010, our volunteers have documented more than 3,000 bird strikes in a small downtown area, about 85% of which were fatal. After picking up the dead birds, we then photograph them and donate their carcasses to the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center for research.



Part of an annual bird collision count
City Wildlife, Inc.
Washington, DC

The birds we find are overwhelming neo-tropical migrants -- beautiful birds -- many of whose populations are in serious decline. Recent studies show a decline in migratory bird populations of 29% just since 1970. Bird/glass collisions are one of the most significant sources

of fatality for these valued and dwindling species.

And these bird strikes take a human toll, too. Two years ago at a DC elementary school, 53 Cedar Waxwings collided with glass along a corridor over a period of several days during their spring migration. The teachers said the children were so traumatized that they had to be kept away from the corridor because it upset them too much to see the birds hitting the glass and dying on the ground. Many adults have told me, too, how upsetting it has been to see a bird hit a window -- and sadly, it is a universal experience.

After 5 years of monitoring, we met with the owners and managers of DC's most problematic buildings to provide ways for them to remediate this problem. In 2016, one of these buildings, the Washington Convention Center, installed bird-safe film at its L Street glass overpass, a feature that was killing many birds. The results have been dramatic: to date, we have seen an 88% reduction in bird strikes at this overpass. What's more, the film is nearly invisible. After lobbying the Convention Center for years to install it, I passed through the overpass soon after it had been installed, didn't even notice it, and asked the maintenance people when it would be put up.

But it is far less expensive to install bird-safe features when a building is first built than to retrofit it later. In many cases, adding bird-safe features to a new building does not add any additional construction cost and may provide other benefits such as reduced glare, sun control and savings in heating and cooling. Moreover, the lighting reductions that are included in most bird-safe standards can significantly reduce energy costs. Two buildings we have monitored in DC have reduced their lighting costs by 15 and 28 percent respectively, just by reducing night time lighting.

The District Department of Energy and Environment has addressed this serious environmental problem by adding two optional bird-safe building credits to its Green Construction Code. These credits are based on the LEED Pilot Credit 55, and will apply to all construction covered by this Code. And just recently, New York City passed a law mandating bird-safe construction for all new buildings and all buildings that plan to replace their windows. Other jurisdictions with bird-safe legislation include San Francisco, Toronto, Oakland, and Cook County, IL -- and many other jurisdictions are considering it.

We encourage Maryland to join in this effort. Establishing requirements for state owned and operated buildings is a highly effective way to start, since this will set an important and effective standard for private construction to follow. With your help, Maryland can be a leader in saving the lives of thousands of birds, controlling energy costs, and eliminating the sadness people feel when they witness these collisions.

I am pleased to have been able to come today to support this important bill and would be glad to provide any information that might be helpful about our bird-collision data or experiences.

Respectfully submitted,
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