

HB0043 Testimony

My name is Benjamin Gantz, I am representing the Audubon Society of Central Maryland and testifying as a volunteer with the Phoenix Wildlife Center and speaking in favor of passing bill HB0043 – Department of General Services – Energy – Conserving Standards (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2022). This bill would require new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) buildings in the state to implement specified bird friendly design features to prevent window collisions. I am a board member of Audubon Society of Central Maryland, which is a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization with members throughout Howard, Frederick, and Carroll counties in Maryland. Window collisions are a leading factor in the decline of North American bird populations. Birds have numerous benefits to both the environment and economy. A few of their important services include pest control, seed dispersal, and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation. Birds are also an important part of tourism in the state. The diversity of unique species found across Maryland's geography draws in birders and photographers.

I have been very fortunate in being able to volunteer with the Phoenix Wildlife Center, which is also a 501 (c)3 non-profit based in Baltimore County dedicated to the rehabilitation and release of Maryland's wildlife. We receive a wide variety of wildlife species throughout the year that need help from different situations. One issue in particular, window collisions, is responsible for a large majority of the birds brought in. This problem is at its highest during Spring and Fall migration, when birds are making their way from wintering grounds to their summer breeding sites. Many of the birds we receive during these times are found in Baltimore City. Volunteers with an organization called Lights out Baltimore (LOB) walk around the city regularly, picking up any birds that fall victim to window collisions. Unfortunately, many are killed. Those that aren't are brought in to the wildlife center where they are treated appropriately.

During Spring and Fall, downed birds are put into brown paper bags for transport and to help them recover. It is not uncommon to see these bags filling incubators in the clinic. Although these birds are alive, not all of them can be saved. Their injuries from the collision are too severe. Many of them can be released, but are injured and require treatment. One of the most common injuries is brain trauma, and the birds must be medicated properly to heal them. Many of the birds only suffer from shock and after being allowed to stabilize and rest in the bag for several hours, they can be released. Some of the migratory bird species that we receive include American Redstarts, Common Yellowthroats, Ovenbirds, and American Woodcocks. Some species suffer from higher mortality from window collisions than others. Woodcocks are an example. This species is also one of the more common brought to us, and at times many have come in within just a few days. I remember at one point, in less than a weeks' time, around 10 individuals were brought to us.

Although the majority of window-struck birds brought to us are from Baltimore City during migration, we also receive calls from people who have had birds hit their window from many other places throughout the year. Window collisions occur throughout the state and are more likely to occur in urban areas with large buildings. However, they can also occur in less populated areas. Passing bill HB0043 would save the lives of many birds by preventing them from colliding with windows of new LEED buildings. This would be especially important for migratory birds making their way through Maryland, and it would also make a difference for our resident bird species. Not only would the window design standards in HB0043 benefit birds, they would also increase the cooling efficiency of the buildings during summer. Since window collisions are a major contributor to bird declines, passing this bill would make a big difference. Different places in Maryland, such as Howard County have already retrofitted certain buildings to make them bird friendly, and there are new buildings planned that will also eliminate the risk of window collisions. Passing HB0043 would further protect our birds. I ask that you support bill HB0043 – Department of General Services – Energy – Conserving Standards (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2022).

Thank you,

Benjamin Gantz