



February 22, 2022

Written Testimony for [SB367](#)- Patuxent River Commission – Membership

Position: Favorable

Dear Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

For 125 years, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB367- - Patuxent River Commission – Membership.

The Patuxent River directly impacts the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed area, its residents and wildlife. The Patuxent River Commission (PRC) created 1984 (four years after the 1980 Patuxent River Watershed Act) is Maryland’s only governmental river commission created as a safety valve for concerns about the decline of the Patuxent River. Historically, the PRC has acted as an independent watchdog that has worked tirelessly to help preserve and enhance the Patuxent River, ensuring, for example, that construction projects impinging on the waterway were appropriately designed and implemented to minimize any negative impact on the river from inappropriate land use or excessive sediment releases, etc.

Fred Tutman, The Patuxent River Keeper, has been a crucial member of the PRC for more than two decades. Fred has been an outspoken advocate for a variety of watershed-related environmental justice issues. His recent dismissal by Governor Larry Hogan and MD Secretary of Planning, Robert S. McCord without reasonable cause, along with non-reappointment of other outspoken PRC members, raises grave concerns. Furthermore, in order for the PRC to remain independent, the commission members must demonstrate the knowledge and skills to act in the public interest without any conflicts of interest. For this reason, it is critical that criteria be established to ensure that all members of the PRC share such qualifications, and that the Patuxent River Keeper be included as a full voting member of the PRC. The passage of SB367 requires the addition of the Patuxent Riverkeeper as a full voting member of the PRC Effective June 1, 2022.

The passage of this bill with the recommended amendment would provide critical support to the ongoing existence of an effective, independent PRC able to speak out against projects that would cause irreparable harm to the Patuxent River and its environment, and damage the health and welfare of Maryland’s residents, wildlife, and natural resources. ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters recommend that the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee support the passage of SB367.

Sincerely,

Pamela Janssen, Conservation Volunteer, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

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