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January 31, 2023

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland **SB 0062**

Good Afternoon. Thank you for having me here today. My name is Jim Brown. I am the policy director for Audubon Mid-Atlantic, located here in Maryland. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing local chapters and over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution and climate change.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic enthusiastically supports *SB 62 -Land Use – Public Service Companies – Pollinator–Friendly Vegetation Management.* Specifically, we support this bill because it shows how human and wildlife communities can be managed to the benefit of both, and that humans have the capacity to retrofit our infrastructure systems in ways that provide beneficial co-uses – In this case the dual location of vital utility corridors with important ecosystem enhancements.

The Avian Science tells us that birds are in decline. The leading causes of these declines are habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. 1/3 of eastern forest bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. Grassland and Shrubland birds such as eastern towhees and brown thrashers are disappearing even faster. Both forest and shrubland species require the types of meadows, and shrub condition that SB62 will allow to grow in what is currently fragmented habitat, by allowing utility corridors to double as habitat, enabling successional landscape conditions and “edge meadows,” to be restored, by allowing low growing grasses, and shrubs to repopulate the fragmented ecosystems, providing critical landscape diversity for birds to nest, rest, breed, and feed.

Iconic birds such as – the Wood Thrush, American Kestrel, Field Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Eastern Meadowlark and Blue Grosbeak which are in decline across Maryland will benefit from this bill, as will the people that get to see them.

The Science tells us

- Eastern forests are becoming increasingly fragmented
- Forest fragmentation leads to lower productivity or “nest success” in bird populations
- Utility Right of ways create an abrupt landscape transition with the adjacent mature forest, resulting in fragmentation effects like nest predation and parasitism for the surrounding forest block.

- Restoring these right of ways to a more natural state, allowing for grasses, meadow and edge conditions to prosper will increase habitat, and decrease the problematic fragmentation that we see now with power lines.

SB 62 allows communities and jurisdictions to address these ecological challenges by preserving the integrity of our utility grid, WHILE integrating beneficial uses of the corridors to make Maryland a leader habitat conservation, ecosystem preservation, and the protection of birds now and in the future.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

Thank You,

Jim Brown

Policy Director

Audubon Mid-Atlantic