



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1129
(WILDLIFE – PROTECTIONS AND HIGHWAY CROSSINGS)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 28, 2024

Dear Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Although our road network interconnects our cities, allowing us to reach where we need to, it poses a dangerous and significant barrier to our animal neighbors in Maryland. To animals, roads break apart their habitats and force dangerous crossings in search of food, habitation, and mates. As our roads expand, habitats grow more and more subdivided, fragmented by the road network that ties us together. The Department of Natural Resources lists 526 endangered animals native to Maryland, many of which are put under stress from the fragmentation of their habitats by our road network.

Additionally, vehicle-wildlife collisions, particularly from deer, represent a major economic cost to our state. The [cost of an insurance claim alone from a deer collision averaged \\$6,300 in 2022](#). Given that Maryland sees more than [33,000 deer-vehicle collisions per year](#), this represents a cost to Maryland insurance companies alone of more than \$200 million annually. Our neighbors in the Virginia Department of Transportation estimate that the total costs of a collision rise to over \$40,000 after adding in costs for medical bills, missed work, and removal of animal carcasses. Vehicle-animal collisions don't only threaten animals, they threaten us as well. Just last month, in a tragic incident, [a driver was killed in a deer-vehicle collision in Charles County](#).

However, there are well-tested solutions for both of these problems. Well-placed wildlife overpasses, underpasses, and exclusion fencing can reduce the incidence of vehicle-animal collisions by over 90%, preventing collisions that are dangerous to humans and deadly to animals. [In Virginia](#), culverts with exclusionary fencing paid for themselves on average in less than 2 years. HB 1129 will pursue these commonsense solutions by instructing the DNR and State Highway Administration to develop a list of the species most affected by habitat fragmentation by our road networks, create best practices guidelines for both infrastructure rehabilitation and building new infrastructure that will include wildlife crossings and exclusion fencing, and, given available funding, wildlife maps to direct attention to where it will have the greatest impact. It will also establish a Wildlife Highways Crossing Fund, collected from a fee issued on insured motor vehicles, to fund these developments. This fee – of just \$10 for every vehicle – promises to save many times that amount on preventable collisions for everyday Marylanders and insurance companies alike.

There is significant federal money available. The federal Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program will grant [\\$225 million over the next three years](#) for programs to reconnect fragmented habitats and prevent animal-vehicle collisions, which our neighbors in Virginia and Pennsylvania have both already taken

advantage of for their own programs. Virginia was recently awarded over \$600 thousand to develop a model to identify priority locations for wildlife crossings infrastructure. Pennsylvania was awarded \$840 thousand to develop a comprehensive statewide strategic plan to address safe management and stewardship for wildlife crossings. [See all FY22-FY23 awards at this link.](#)

This money, which was passed as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is not guaranteed to continue – this is an opportunity that it would be a severe mistake to pass up, promising significant funding for a program which will save our critical environmental heritage from the threat of extinction and everyday Marylanders from countless broken bones, insurance claims, and totaled cars.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB 1129. Thank you.