



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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January 31, 2024
Finance Committee
SB172 : Private Passenger Motor Vehicle Insurance - Premium Increases - Collisions
With Wild Animals
LETTER OF INFORMATION

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The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our supporters across Maryland, wants to provide the Committee with brief informational testimony related to SB172: *Private Passenger Motor Vehicle Insurance - Premium Increases - Collisions with Wild Animals*. We thank the sponsor for introducing a bill that seeks to utilize different strategies and responses to conflict with wildlife. We are offering this informational testimony to ensure the Committee is aware of additional tools related to this issue, for their future consideration.

Most (87%) animal-vehicle collisions in the United States involve deer but other species are struck, too.¹ Many factors contribute to deer-vehicle collisions, such as traffic volume, drivers' speeds and distraction levels, the extent to which roads bisect habitat, the extent of visual barriers and speed limits. Fortunately, many humane and effective ways to reduce the number of collisions involving deer exist. They range from increasing individual awareness and caution to implementing new technology and structures. Some of the best collision-reducing efforts focus on public education of both current and new drivers. The messaging should focus on driver awareness and lowering the rate of speed.

One of the most successful techniques for alleviating animal-vehicle collisions is to **use fencing** to prevent deer from crossing roads and aid in guiding them to places where it is safe to cross. Fences must be at least 8 feet high to deter deer from jumping over. **Wildlife crossing overpasses or underpasses** help deer, black bears and other wildlife safely cross busy roads and intersections. **Streiter Lite® reflectors**, which reflect headlights to create an optical illusion of a fence and alert deer to oncoming vehicles, have been reported to reduce deer-vehicle collisions by 60-100%. **Special electronic devices** alert oncoming vehicles by combining a strobe light effect with high-pitched sounds.² An important and affordable approach to increasing driver awareness and modifying driver behavior can be achieved by utilizing moveable, changeable **message boards at crossing hotspots**. **These signs** that alert drivers to pending roadway dangers are contrary to static crossing signage broadcast important seasonal tips such as when fawns are likely to be crossing the road behind their mothers, or during the November "rut" when bucks are on the move and likely to be crossing roadways in pursuit of does.

The Committee should also be aware that last December, the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife-crossing projects in 17 states and four tribal nations.³ The funds are part of a 5-year commitment to provide \$350 million to support construction of crossings to protect people and wildlife on our nation's roadways. DOT estimates Americans are involved in one to two



million animal-vehicle collisions annually resulting in 200 human death and 27,000 injuries.⁴ The estimated average cost of a single animal-vehicle collisions is \$6,126, which includes property damage, human injuries and/or fatalities.⁵

In one study, the construction of three underpasses cost more than three million dollars, but that figure represented less than 2% of the entire cost of a new section of highway.⁶ In comparison, DOT estimates the annual costs associated with animal-vehicle collisions is \$8.4 billion annually.⁷ Safe passages are worth their investment because of the much higher cost savings to society.

Finally, it is necessary and important to **set up a data collection system to track collision hotspots** to understand where, when and at what scale strikes are occurring. Rochester Hills, Michigan implemented these solutions and realized a large drop in deer-car collisions in the first year and has experienced success over the last decade with a multi-faceted approach for approximately \$5,000 a year.⁸

Thank you for this opportunity to address the vexing issue of animal-vehicle collisions with you and we hope this informational letter will inform future efforts to protect people and wildlife in Maryland.

Sincerely,

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¹ Ibid.

² DeerDeter – Wildlife Crossing Guard. <http://deerdeter.com/>

³ Lauren Sforza, "Us Grants \$110 Million to Improve Wildlife Road Crossings," *The Hill* Dec. 5, 2023.

⁴ Ibid. U.S. Department of Transportation, "Wildlife-Vehicle Reduction Study: Report to Congress," <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf> (2008).

⁵ "Wildlife-Vehicle Reduction Study: Report to Congress."

⁶ M. F. McCollister and F. T. van Manen, "Effectiveness of Wildlife Underpasses and Fencing to Reduce Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 74, no. 8 (2010). McCollister and van Manen 2010 citing Jones et al. 2010.

⁷ U.S. Department of Transportation, "Wildlife-Vehicle Reduction Study: Report to Congress," p. 9.

⁸ Rochesterhills.org, "City highlights deer awareness month."
https://www.rochesterhills.org/news_detail_T9_R245.php