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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: HB236 “Energy-Conserving Standards (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2021)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 31, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges support for this legislation, which will require the Department of General Services to promulgate standards for state buildings to better protect our bird population and promote energy efficiency. In 2020, Howard County became the first county in Maryland to pass similar legislation addressing this issue, CB11-2020.

There are many challenges to the survival of both residential and migratory birds. Nearly one third of the 800 species of birds in the United States are endangered, threatened, or in serious decline. In Maryland, there are 436 documented species of birds, which is over half of the birds documented in the United States; 72 of these species are rare, threatened, or endangered. Maryland is located along the Atlantic flyway, where billions of birds migrate seasonally north to south and back again. There are some birds that are especially vulnerable and have been identified by the Audubon Society as priority birds to protect. These include the Golden-Winged Warbler, the Wood Thrush, the Black-Throated Blue Warbler, and many others.

As good stewards of our natural world, it is our responsibility to help preserve biodiversity when we can. It is estimated that up to one billion birds die by collision with glass in America, and we also know through research and practice that these deaths are preventable. The buildings we construct (or significantly renovate) can and should use bird-friendly design.

Importantly, when this is done, buildings also are more energy efficient. While well-placed windows are critical to a building design, and allow for natural lighting, the overuse of windows is detrimental to overall energy efficiency. Windows are the weakest link in the building envelope, and therefore the greater the surface area of windows in a building, the more energy is needed to keep it cool in the summer and warm in the winter. In state-owned and managed buildings, the taxpayers are paying for extra heating and cooling costs when windows are overused. Also, the extra energy comes at a cost to the environment and contributes to climate change when it relies on fossil fuels.

In sum, incorporating bird-friendly design will save energy and protect birds. Maryland should take this first step to lead the way by adopting this legislation. Please support this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.