



March 8, 2022

**Written Testimony for [SB783](#) – Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights  
Position: Favorable**

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Dear Senate Judicial Proceedings & Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committees,

For 125 years, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank the Senate Judicial Proceedings & Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committees for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB783 – Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights.

At ANS, we have worked to connect people of the Washington DC metro area with nature. Due to historically racist policies such as residential segregation, unjust siting of polluting industries, and outright exclusion from natural areas, not all residents have had equal access to or are near a clean, safe, and healthful environment. This amendment would ensure that each person has a fundamental right to a healthful environment by enshrining it in our state constitution. As we navigate today's public health, social, and economic crises, it is critical now more than ever to support the passage of SB783.

Communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of the ill effects of pollution due to toxic facilities. Over 85% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet the EPA healthy air standards for smog pollution.<sup>1</sup> By allowing this amendment to be voted on by Marylanders, it will provide the opportunity to gain the tools to address and continue to dismantle historical environmental justice issues faced by communities of color and low-income communities in Maryland. The amendment will also mandate that the state needs to protect the inherent rights of nature to be safe from pollution and excess extraction for the benefit of all current and future generations.

Similar environmental amendments have been passed in other states (Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and New York) and it has added constructively to the environmental and governmental framework of those that have adopted them.<sup>2</sup> In fact, a recent poll showed 76% of Marylander voters support this amendment.<sup>3</sup>

The passage of this bill would ensure rights to a healthful environment are protected and enforced. ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters recommend that the Senate Judicial Proceedings, & Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committees support the passage of SB783.

Sincerely,

**Sean Lynch**, Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society

**Denisse Guitarra**, MD Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Club – Environmental Human Rights Amendment (factsheet). Available at: <https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/legislation>

<sup>2</sup> Sierra Club – Environmental Human Rights Amendment. Available at: <https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/legislation>

<sup>3</sup> MD Campaign for Environmental Human Rights. 2022. Majority of Maryland Voters Support the Environmental Human Rights Amendment. Available at: <https://mdehr.org/majority-of-maryland-voters-support-the-environmental-human-rights-amendment/>

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