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March 3, 2023

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

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland **SB836 Maryland Native Plants Program**

Good afternoon. My name is Jim Brown. I am the policy director for Audubon Mid-Atlantic, here in Maryland. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing 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 the Maryland Native Plants Program. Specifically, SB836 protects birds and it protects our unique landscapes for future generations of Marylanders to benefit from. This bill is good for birds, for people, and for the dynamic ecosystems that make Maryland.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of eastern forest and grassland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. Ruby throated hummingbirds have fewer native plants to sustain themselves. Iconic birds such as – the Wood Thrush, American Kestrel, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark and Baltimore Oriole which are in decline across Maryland will benefit from this bill. SB836 will slow and reverse this trend by encouraging voluntary measures to label native plants at nurseries, certify native plant retailers, and promote the value of native plants in Maryland’s landscapes through education and outreach.

SB836 is not just for the birds. When native plants are a dominant factor in the landscape all wildlife benefits. Pollinators thrive, beneficial seeds are dispersed, pests are kept in check, and human communities benefit. Native forests, meadows and gardens support local economies throughout the state through ecosystem services, green job training, tourism, and associated industries. Promoting native plants in Maryland is also an investment in a future defined by climate change. We know that forests, grasslands, wetlands, and coastal marshes, and gardens comprising native plants sequester carbon, slow flooding, filter water, and buffer vulnerable communities from increasing risks of climate change related storm events and sea level rise.

The Science tells us:

- Invasive and exotic plant species provide minimal ecosystem services to birds and other wildlife
- Maryland’s unique landscapes and birds are under threat from non-native plants

- Promoting native plants in Maryland's landscapes is a critical step to protecting our state's biodiversity, protecting bird habitat, and keeping Maryland resilient in the face of changing climate

SB836 will protect birds and bird habitat, create a more resilient environment, and support the local Maryland nursery economy. It will also continue to hold Maryland up as a leader in habitat conservation, ecosystem preservation, and the protection of birds now and into the future.

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

Thank You,

Jim Brown

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