



MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



February 17, 2023

Committee: Environment and Transportation

**Testimony on: HB0503 Natural Resources—Greenspace Equity Program--
Establishment**

Position: Support: HB0503

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) and Safe Skies Maryland support HB0503 and asks that the House Environment and Transportation Committee give a favorable report of HB0503.

MOS is a Maryland-based volunteer organization of some 1800 members, with 15 chapters in Maryland. We are devoted to the study, preservation and enjoyment of birds and their habitat. Safe Skies is an initiative of MOS to raise awareness of the threat of bird collisions and how science and technology can solve this issue.

MOS and Safe Skies support HB0503, which would provide annual state funding to projects that will increase and enhance community greenspace in the state's underserved and overburdened communities. Such community greenspace would include things like community gardens, community meeting open space, community woodlands, green networks, parks, trails and urban farms. These underserved and overburdened communities are more than deserving of funding for open and green spaces, which can be scarce in such communities.

Community gardens and urban farms would help improve nutrition in underserved communities, which are often located in so-called "food deserts," that lack access to fresh, unprocessed food.

Studies have shown the mental health benefits of time outdoors in nature, something most underserved and overburdened communities lack. A recent study in Los Angeles showed that mental health is related to the distance of a residence from an urban park, the closer to the park, the better mental health. There are also improvements in physical activity.¹ Other research has shown that nature

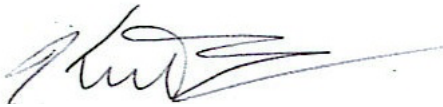
¹ Sturm, Roland and Deborah Cohen, Proximity to Urban Parks and Mental Health, Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics, volume 17, issue 1, March 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4049158/>

experience results in increased psychological well-being and reduction in some forms of mental illness such as anxiety disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and depression.² These green spaces also connect children to nature, benefitting their mental well-being and serving as a gateway to a lifelong interest in nature.

Surprisingly, such gardens and farms can also provide bird habitat. The Lake Elkhorn Community Gardens in Columbia, Maryland, are a well-known birding hotspot. It goes without saying that woodlands, green networks, parks, and trails also provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. These areas would also provide valuable stop-over habitat for migrating birds as they cross vast urban and suburban spaces.

Our birds are in steep decline with almost 30% of the bird population of North America since 1970. One factor is habitat loss.³ HB0503 will add bird habitat in habitat-deficient areas, while benefiting the mental and nutritional well-being of unserved and overburdened communities. MOS and Safe Skies whole-heartedly support HB0503, and urges the Environment and Transportation Committee to issue a favorable report.

Sincerely,



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² Bratman, Gregory, et al, Nature and Mental Health” An ecosystem service perspective, ScienceAdvances, Volume 5, issue 7, 24 July 2019, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aax0903>

³ Loss, Scott et al, Bird-building collisions in the United States: Estimates of annual mortality and species vulnerability, The Condor, Volume 116, Issue 1, February 2014, <https://academic.oup.com/condor/article/116/1/8/5153098>



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