



February 8, 2023

**Committee: Health and Government Operations**

**Testimony On: HB0006: Department of General Services - Energy-Conserving Standards (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023)**

**Position: Support: HB0006**

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) asks that the House Health and Government Operations Committee give a favorable report of HB0006 and move it to the full House of Delegates.

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.

As you are aware, it is estimated that up to a billion birds a year die in collisions with glass on buildings and other structures.<sup>1</sup> While birds face many threats to their survival, the dramatic increase in the use of glass as a building material need not pose the unsustainable threat to birdlife that it currently does. We can use glass and still help our migrating and resident birds be able to navigate safely in and through our state.

Maryland sits in a vital position along one of the four major migration flyways, Maryland, the Atlantic Flyway, and billions of migrating birds pass through our state each migration season. Our State bird, the Baltimore Oriole, is one such migrant that returns yearly to breed and departs in Fall for wintering grounds in the Caribbean, Central and South America. It is also a frequent victim of collisions with the glass that has become increasingly and more widely used in our state. Many otherwise successful fledgling young of the year will also perish in what would have been their first migration when they become confused by glass. Indeed, according to the Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership (MBCP), "Maryland (has) features that support an impressive diversity of ecosystems, habitats, and species...(and) due to a variety of threats, some 143 species of birds have been recognized as 'Species of Greatest Conservation Need'". The MBCP further notes that, "Over 200 species of birds breed in Maryland, more than half of which are considered to be Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Many species that breed in the state migrate to other areas outside of breeding season, and given the mobility of birds, planning at the

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

landscape level and considering species needs during their full life cycle is important. Further, working with a variety of partners will be critical to minimize mortality due to collisions.”

While many man-made factors challenge birds, perhaps none is as immediately fatal and artificial as a collision with glass. Birds have evolved to make decisions at flight speed and given the chance to avoid an object they can see, make quick decisions to do so. The air is their habitat, and the lightweight frames of birds enable them to fly that also makes them horrifyingly vulnerable to collision with glass. It is noteworthy that people cannot see glass and frequently walk into glass doors and other objects unless an added feature alerts them to its presence. We can also alert birds to the presence of glass and for many reasons, it is incumbent upon us to do so.

The diversity of bird species and their habitats is under increasing threat. Unless concerted efforts are taken in the near future Maryland will lose some of its greatest assets – healthy natural systems and the wide range of birds, plants, and other wildlife that they support. Maryland risks economic impact as well as a decrease in quality of life. An estimated 900,000 residents and non-residents enjoy birding in the state. While Marylanders generated \$483 million from wildlife-watching activities in 2011, the Total Industrial Output (TIO), which includes, direct, indirect, and induced effects, totaled over \$909 million, produced 10,807 full- and part-time jobs, and generated \$88.4 million in state and local tax revenue. Nationally, Americans who watch and feed birds contribute \$41 billion to the nation’s economy every year.<sup>2</sup>

Birds provide invaluable ecological services in areas of pest control, seed dispersal, and pollination. The immediate threats to their survival and a disruption to our symbiotic relationship with them are matters of great importance for a variety of reasons. It wasn’t that long ago that people were shooting birds out of the sky at a faster rate than they could reproduce. The same affect will result from continuing to erect glass buildings without incorporating reasonable measures to help the bird see the glass and avoid collisions with it. Both scenarios are directly responsible for removing birds at a faster rate than be sustained by reproduction.

HB0006 is an important step in dealing with the issue of glass collisions. Bird-safe features are cost-neutral in the design phase of new buildings. They will also save energy, resulting in lower operating costs, and lower carbon emissions, which drive climate change. Two-thirds of North America’s birds face an increasing risk of

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<sup>2</sup> US Fish and Wildlife Service, Economic Impact: Birds, Birdwatching and the U.S. Economy, November 16, 2017, <https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/bird-watching/valuing-birds.php>

extinction from global warming, 389 species are at risk.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons, many jurisdictions across the nation have passed bird-safe legislation, most notably New York City. Here in Maryland, Howard County was the first jurisdiction to pass such legislation in July 2020. Washington, D.C. City Council recently passed a bird-friendly bill and Mayor Bowser signed it.

Sustainable growth in Maryland is very important. incorporating bird-safe features in buildings will allow this growth to continue without unsustainable bird mortality from collisions and carbon emissions., while being cost-neutral. We therefore ask you issue a favorable report on the Maryland Sustainable Building Act of 2023 (HB0006).

Sincerely,



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<sup>3</sup> Survival by Degrees, 389 Bird Species on the Brink, National Audubon Society, 2019, <https://nas-national-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/climatereport-2019-english-lowres.pdf>