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February 8, 2023

To: Maryland House of Delegates, Health and Government Operations Committee

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland **HB 6 Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023**

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 HB 6 – Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023. The provisions in this bill will save birds lives. What is good for birds is good for the people, ecosystems, and economies of Maryland. Specifically, HB 6 requires energy efficient and bird friendly design practices. These methods to protect birds are already codified as an optional LEED Innovation Credit by the U.S. Green Building Council. HB 6 will make it mandatory on state funded buildings, setting a precedent for sustainable and eco-friendly building design in Maryland.

Over 450 species of birds have been identified in Maryland. Every spring, millions of birds fly through the state on their way from tropical Central and South America. Some of them such as the Wood Thrush, Baltimore Oriole, and Yellow Warbler stay here all spring and summer to breed, while countless others pass through to their preferred breeding grounds further north. Millions more live in Maryland year-round, such as our iconic Cardinals and Robins which we see outside this building today. All of them however face very real threats from ever increasing deadly collisions with buildings in Maryland. More than half of US Birds are declining. 70 species of birds in the U.S. have lost more than 50% of their population in the last 50 years. These numbers include birds that are culturally important to Maryland such as our waterfowl and shorebirds, and iconic forest species that fill our air with melodic song.

The rapid declines in birds signal the intensifying stresses that birds face around world and here in Maryland on the Atlantic Flyway due to bird collisions with buildings. Collisions are a leading factor in the decline of North American bird populations—in the United States we lose one billion birds each year to collisions with window glass. In Maryland these collisions occur in urban, suburban, and rural areas. HB 6 will increase protections for both for migratory and resident birds. Birds have numerous benefits to both the environment and economy. Every year that bird populations decline, we lose valuable services in pollination, seed dispersal, and pest insect consumption. Birds are also critical to Maryland’s tourism industry. Wildlife watching in Maryland generates over \$450 million in economic activity annually in the state.

The Science tells us:

- Collisions with glass buildings kill birds
- Buildings with less glass are more energy efficient
- Reducing the amount of glass in new buildings will increase energy efficiency and save millions of birds lives each year

The Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023 will also ensure our state continues to be a national leader in climate policy and energy efficiency—helping achieve the goals set out in the transformational 2022 Climate Solutions Now Act. Howard County has become the first jurisdiction to pass bird-friendly building legislation in Maryland. New York City and the State of Illinois have also recently passed similar laws to save birds and increase energy efficiency. Last year, the D.C. Council passed a bird-friendly bill that the mayor signed into law last week, and under the Biden administration, the General Services Administration now includes bird-friendly standards in its guidelines for federal buildings.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic urges a favorable review of HB 6 – for the benefit of Maryland’s residents, birds, and ecosystems and to keep Maryland national leader in climate resiliency.

Thank You,

Jim Brown

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