

SB902: Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

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Ethan Simon

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman and the distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. I am Ethan Simon, a junior at the University of Maryland and legislative intern for Senator Lewis Young. It is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in support of SB902: Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings. This bill aims to identify species at risk due to state highways, conduct a statewide survey of the deer population, and update guidelines for the future design of bridges, culverts, and state highways to ensure that transportation and wildlife infrastructure are aligned with the needs of our ecosystem.

News headlines like "Deer-Caused Crash Kills 2" and "Motorcycle Collides with Deer on PA Turnpike 43; 2 Fatalities in Crash" are all too common when I visit my hometown in Pennsylvania. As a resident of a state consistently ranked among the top for both deer population and animal-related crashes, I understand the urgency of preserving biodiversity.

In Maryland a familiar narrative unfolds, "63-Year-Old Man Killed In Fatal Motor Vehicle Accident Involving A Deer." It is a different state, but the same story. I share this perspective to emphasize the urgent need for wildlife crossings, championed by SB902. Though my experiences are rooted in Pennsylvania, my time in Maryland, coupled with my potential future residency, drives my advocacy for safer roads. Wildlife crossings hold immense potential to enable animals to navigate their habitats and ours safely, without endangering drivers.

The relentless expansion of roads, railroads, and industrial developments have boxed wildlife into increasingly trafficked areas, leading to rising collision rates in Maryland. AAA reports a \$2,300 increase in average claim costs over the past five years, and Frederick and Howard Counties consistently rank in the nation's top 10 for animal-related collisions.

Wildlife highway crossings represent the future of coexistence between humans and biodiversity in Maryland, with research indicating a potential 90% reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions. These crossings not only enhance driver safety but also preserve ecosystems and save thousands of dollars in potential damages.

As we strive to enhance our infrastructure in a rapidly evolving world, wildlife highway crossings emerge as a crucial commitment to safeguard Maryland's rich biodiversity and native habitats while meeting the needs of its over six million residents.

I urge a favorable report on SB902. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Ethan Simon