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February 19, 2024

To: Chair Feldman and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 405 Outdoor Lighting - Standards and Use of State Funds

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 405. 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. We work with partner organizations, government agencies, and local communities to protect birds and the places they need to survive now, and into the future. SB 405 will help the state of Maryland make decisions which both protect birds and help the state reach our ambitious climate and energy goals.

Audubon supports SB 405 for two important reasons:

1. The protection of birds who face serious threats from current lighting practices, will benefit from new lighting standards, and
2. The energy efficiency and climate change mitigation that will result in more sustainable lighting design guidelines will help Maryland reach our climate and energy goals.

Science tells us that birds become disoriented when flying over brightly lit urban and suburban areas. When birds fly into these areas, they become confused by the lights and the built environment becomes a deadly trap. Traditional lighting techniques paired with buildings with clear and reflective glass cause birds to collide with the buildings. These light pollution induced collisions kill or injure millions of birds each year. In Maryland we know that our songbirds, warblers and other iconic Maryland birds migrate at night, causing them to become disoriented and trapped in our hazard filled night sky. Aside from collisions, these light sources trap birds in hovering motions, disrupting natural migration patterns, which negatively affects breeding patterns. This is a significant threat to bird populations up and down the east coast. But the good news is there are technologies and practices which can reduce these threats, while still providing adequate lighting our society needs at night. SB 405 will enable the state of Maryland to consider and recommend these smart, modern, sustainable approaches to lighting, which do not endanger our bird populations.

From our Atlantic shoreline and Chesapeake Bay marshes to our urban parks and western Maryland mountains, birds in Maryland are under threat. They all travel through the built environment and will benefit significantly from reducing the threats that unnecessary light pollution causes them now. SB 405 will create the groundwork for reducing these threats and it will hold Maryland up as a leader in conservation planning.

In addition to establishing best practices for lighting, which will reduce light pollution and reduce threats to birds, SB 405 will also set standards for more efficiently using electricity in lighting. This will help Maryland reduce emissions, and meet the ambitious goals established in the 2022 climate solutions now act.

Science also tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. By setting energy efficient lighting standards in Maryland, SB 405 will support efforts to keep Maryland on track to meet our pollution and emissions reduction goals – mitigating the threat that climate change induced habitat loss is causing for Maryland’s birds. SB 405 will lay the framework for demonstrating how planning for the built environment will have important co-benefits for conservation and biodiversity throughout the state. It will hold Maryland up as a leader in the protection of birds now and in the future.

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

Thank You,

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