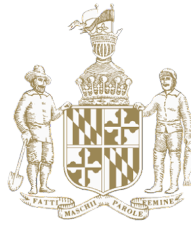


SHEILA RUTH
Legislative District 44B
Baltimore County

Environment and Transportation
Committee

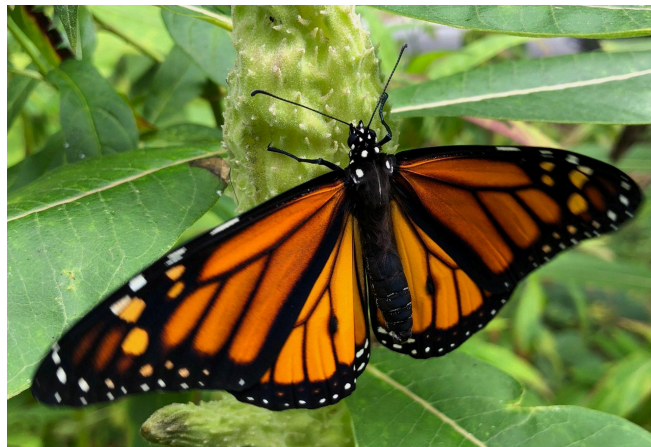


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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB22
(AGRICULTURE - POLLINATOR HABITAT PLAN - REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 7, 2024



The Monarch Butterfly, a key - and beautiful - pollinator, at rest.

Pollinators such as bees and butterflies play an incredibly important role in our ecosystem and agricultural industry. Most fruit and vegetable crops require pollination, yet pollinator populations are declining due to habitat loss, harmful pesticide usage, and climate change. Loss of pollinators affects agricultural production and food security, which in turn can have serious consequences for both the economy and human health.

We must take urgent action to protect pollinators. The Maryland General Assembly has already taken steps in past years by restricting the sale of neonicotinoid pesticides and requiring the Department of Natural Resources, the Maryland Environmental Service, and the State Highway Administration (SHA) to develop Pollinator Habitat Plans - but further action is necessary.

The SHA has already been developing pollinator-friendly sites under their Pollinator Habitat Plan, but the total area of these sites is not sufficient to protect habitats and do not help guard these insects that are so crucial to our environmental health against their possible mass extinction as much as they could and should. The areas along highways have the potential to provide much larger pollinator meadows, particularly including native plants.

In addition to providing crucial pollinator habitats and protecting agriculture and the food supply that depends on it, native plant meadows filter runoff, thus reducing flooding and improving water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. Not to mention these roadside native plant meadows will grace our highways with beauty that will make your anyone's long commute a more pleasant experience.

Provisions of HB22 require SHA to:

- Develop policies and procedures to develop and maintain pollinator habitats along state highways using native plants;
- Maintain highway pollinator habitats in accordance with the Federal Highway Administration's best management practices for roadside pollinator habitats;
- Provide educational outreach to the general public, community associations, and elected officials regarding SHA's highway pollinator habitats, including signage where appropriate;
- Track federal funding available for the support of pollinator habitats, native flora planting, and invasive species control, including programs under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and apply for any federal funding that SHA determines is appropriate and beneficial;
- Update the Pollinator Habitat Plan annually and post it on the SHA website for public viewing; and
- Publish an annual report on the location and approximate size of any pollinator habitats maintained by SHA.

I worked closely with SHA in developing this bill and took great care to provide necessary protections for pollinators while still leaving SHA the flexibility to manage highway rights-of-way according to their system and safety needs. The bill requires SHA to develop policies but allows them the flexibility to determine what those policies are.

This bill passed the House in 2023 in a slightly different form as HB1006.

Loss of pollinators is already impacting our food systems and our health, and further loss could have a devastating impact on humanity's ability to survive. We must do everything in our power, at every level, to protect these creatures we depend on. Thusly I ask for a favorable report for HB22.



Black-eyed Susans, Maryland's official state flower, on a highway median.