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Committee on Education, Energy,  
and the Environment



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

The Honorable Delegate Korman, Chair  
The Honorable Delegate Boyce, Vice Chair  
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee  
Maryland Senate  
Annapolis, MD

April 2nd, 2024

**Testimony in Support of SB902: Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings**

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and honorable members of this committee,

SB902 is the crossfile of HB1129 and comes to you in a substantially similar posture. A friendly amendment was offered on the Senate floor to require the Maryland Insurance Commissioner to conduct a study on the effects of animal-vehicle collisions, or AVC, have on private insurance premiums. All other amendments are identical to those offered by Delegate Ruth on HB1129.

Animal-vehicle collisions are enormously expensive. In Maryland, there are approximately 33,000 AVC each year. The average insurance cost for each claim is \$6,343<sup>1</sup>, for a collective annual cost of about \$198,000,000. Please note this information was provided by State Farm — the costs are likely even higher when considering all insurer’s data. There are also costs directly to the state, such as accident attendance by emergency personnel, investigation, and carcass removal and disposal — about \$260<sup>2</sup> per AVC, or \$8,580,000 annually. There are also the long-lasting emotional and physical costs of being involved in an AVC, or the 200<sup>3</sup> preventable deaths AVC causes annually. Furthermore, the cost of AVCs are growing. The average cost of a claim for an animal-vehicle collision was \$3,972 in 2018, increasing to \$6,343 in 2022 — about a 60% increase in just four years.<sup>4</sup>

SB902 addresses the high rate of animal-vehicle collisions (AVC) by increasing safety for people and wildlife alike. Specifically, this bill would:

1. Compel the State Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources to work together and identify optimal locations for the integration of wildlife passage components into new and maintenance transportation projects.
2. Permit the State Highway Administration to coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and apply for relevant federal funding opportunities for highway crossings.

<sup>1</sup> Hubbard, Lucy. “Fall Deer Season Increases Drivers’ Risk of Animal Collisions.” *CNS Maryland*, CNS Maryland, 20 Oct. 2023, [cnsmaryland.org/2023/10/18/fall-deer-season-increases-drivers-risk-of-animal-collisions/](https://cnsmaryland.org/2023/10/18/fall-deer-season-increases-drivers-risk-of-animal-collisions/).

<sup>2</sup> Huijser, M.P.; Duffield, J. W.; Clevenger, A.P.; Ament, R.J.; McGowen, P.T. 2009. “Cost-benefit analyses of mitigation measures aimed at reducing collisions with large ungulates in North America: a decision support tool.” *Ecology and Society*. 14(2): 15. [www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art15/](https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art15/) ES-2009-3000.pdf. Price adjusted for inflation.

<sup>3</sup> Ament, R.; Jacobson, S.; Callahan, R.; Brocki, M., eds. 2021. “Highway crossing structures for wildlife: opportunities for improving driver and animal safety.” Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-271. Albany, CA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 51 p.

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/psw/publications/documents/psw\\_gtr271/psw\\_gtr271\\_007.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/psw/publications/documents/psw_gtr271/psw_gtr271_007.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Hubbard 2023

3. Create a voluntary Wildlife Highway Crossing Fund to support wildlife crossing projects and the research necessary to identify the most strategic locations for crossings.

Wildlife crossings are exceptionally effective. When properly utilized, wildlife crossings reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by up to 90%.<sup>5</sup>

The composition of wildlife crossings encompass a variety of structures that are designed or retrofitted to provide safe passage for wildlife above or below a highway. Although wildlife crossing structures do not have standardized designs, they can be categorized as two major types: overpasses and underpasses. Overpasses are traffic-spanning bridges that link habitats by allowing for the movement of a wide range of wildlife, including large mammals. A wildlife underpass is a passage below a roadway in the form of either a bridge or a culvert. Existing bridges and culverts can be replaced or retrofitted to enhance passage by terrestrial or semiaquatic species. The use of fencing alongside these measures ensures that animals are aware of and using the crossings by preventing them from crossing elsewhere nearby.

In 2020, Virginia passed legislation to create a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. In 2021, they passed additional legislation creating a comprehensive program to identify wildlife corridors, protect motorists from collisions with animals, and address barriers to wildlife movement. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support. Since passing this legislation, the state received \$604,318 in federal fundings from a single grant provided by the Federal Highway Administration's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program.

Federal Highway Administration's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program is a fund of \$350 million dollars, which can be used not only for construction but also for designing mapping tools, tracking wildlife, and research. Virginia's application was for the express purpose of prioritizing wildlife crossing locations by researching roads with the highest risk of large animal collisions. However, the amount awarded is tied to the scope of the project. Arizona, for example, received \$23,992,588 for overpass construction.

Maryland has the third highest deer population in the country. A study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that Frederick and Howard Counties ranked sixth and tenth nationwide in deer-related collisions between 2006 and 2018. Arizona, who received the largest federal award amount in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, ranks 30 states below Maryland in frequency of these collisions. This bill would provide Maryland the opportunity to receive the federal funding we deserve.

We know this can work in Maryland. A wildlife passage project for Maryland's Inter-County Connector (connecting Montgomery and Prince George's Counties) includes "bottomless arches" that span streams and natural passages.<sup>6</sup> Post-construction monitoring of the bottomless arches indicates that efforts to support fish populations and passage have been successful. Heavy use by deer, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, turtles, and foxes has been documented.

Wildlife highway crossings are a proven solution that not only reduces wildlife mortality, but also improves driver safety, avoids costly accidents, and keeps traffic flowing. Wildlife crossings can reduce habitat fragmentation and improve landscape connectivity to support animal movements and the ecological processes and services that humans rely upon. These include pollination, free-flowing water,

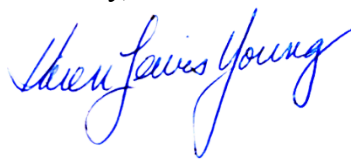
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<sup>5</sup> "Joint Statement Regarding Climate-Informed Wildlife Crossings." *ARC Partnership*, 2023, <https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-and-Crossings-Consensus-Statement-232023-1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Russell, "Wildlife Corridors in Frederick County: Conserving Nature in Maryland's Appalachian Heart." *Climate Change Working Group of Frederick County*, 2023. <https://catocinlandtrust.org/wildlife-corridors-in-frederick-county/>

and recreational opportunities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. To save lives and money, I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'K'.

Senator Karen Lewis Young