



SB0178 – Agriculture – Pollinator Habitat Plan – Requirements for State Highway Administration January 29, 2024 Position: Favorable

Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT) is an environmental advocacy organization on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Since 1970, ACT has been a voice for Delmarva's waterways and continues to defend its mission to promote and encourage the protection of the health, productivity, and sustainability of the waters of Lower Delmarva through advocacy, education and conservation.

I am writing to express my **SUPPORT** for **SB178**, which seeks to improve the process for the establishment and maintenance of pollinator habitats along state highways in Maryland. As a concerned advocate for environmental health, I believe this bill presents a critical opportunity to protect and promote the health of pollinators which are crucial contributors to ecosystems and our food supply.

Pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and other insects, play an indispensable role in our agricultural systems by facilitating the reproduction of flowering plants. However, their populations have been in decline due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change. Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures to create and maintain habitats that support pollinator populations, ensuring their resilience and biodiversity.

Senate Bill 0178 mandates the establishment of a comprehensive pollinator habitat plan by the State Highway Administration, outlining best management practices for the identification, maintenance, and enhancement of pollinator habitat areas along state highways. By incorporating policies to encourage the use of pollinator-friendly native plants, addressing the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, and educating the public about the importance of pollinator habitats, this bill represents a positive step towards pollinator protection.

Furthermore, the bill requires the administration to track and evaluate federal programs providing funding for pollinator habitats, native plants, and invasive species control, and to apply for such funding when appropriate. This stance not only demonstrates Maryland's commitment to environmental stewardship but will also ensure resources to support these pollinator habitat initiatives.

Regular updates to the pollinator habitat plan, as mandated by the bill, ensure accountability and transparency in the administration's efforts, allowing for continuous improvement. **By providing information on current policies, procedures, and the locations of maintained habitat areas, the State Highway Administration can engage with stakeholders and foster a collaborative approach to pollinator conservation.**

In conclusion, Senate Bill 0178 presents a positive opportunity for Maryland to lead by example in pollinator conservation efforts. By enacting this legislation, we can take meaningful steps to protect pollinator populations, preserve biodiversity, and ensure the sustainability of our ecosystems for future generations. I urge the committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB178** for the benefit of Maryland's environment and agricultural heritage.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Taylor Swanson,
Assateague Coastkeeper, on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust.

