



March 4, 2025

Bill: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/hb/hb0631F.pdf>

Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB0631 Eminent Domain—Agricultural and Conservation Easements—Prohibited Taking

Position: Support HB0631

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) strongly supports HB0631 and urges the Committee to issue a favorable report. This bill would prohibit the State and any of its instrumentalities or subdivisions from exercised eminent domain over any property under permanent agricultural or conservation easement.

We support this bill because over 70% of wildlife habitat is on private property, and if we wish to preserve habitat for wildlife, then private lands are crucial. Agricultural and Conservation easements permanently protect wildlife habitat on these lands, and these easements should be preserved.

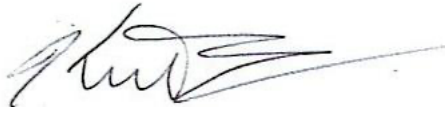
MOS is particularly concerned about the proposed Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP). It will cut through the Important Bird Area known as the Monocacy Grasslands in Frederick and Carroll Counties, and come close to the Pretty Boy Reservoir in Baltimore County. It will cross 483 acres of Tier II Watersheds, 47 acres of wetlands, and 125 acres of riparian buffers. 377 acres of forest will be removed. The project is to power data centers in Northern Virginia, Maryland taxpayers and rate-payers will not benefit. Much of this land is in private property, and some under agricultural or environmental easements. They would be preserved if this bill passes.

Aside from MPRP, this bill will preserve land protected by agricultural and environmental easements to benefit wildlife throughout Maryland, including the birds we treasure. Likewise, the preservation of family farms, many held for generations, will benefit our birds.

We urge a favorable Committee Report from the Committee. North America has lost almost 30% of its birds since 1970.¹ Loss of habitat is one on the major causes of these declines.

¹ Rosenberg, Kenneth V. et al, Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, VOL 366, NO. 6451, 19 September 2019, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313?adobe_mc=MCORGID%3D242B6472541199F70A4C98A6%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1707754028

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kurt R. Schwarz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kurt R. Schwarz
Conservation Chair Emeritus
Maryland Ornithological Society
www.mdbirds.org