



Date: February 19, 2025

Bill: HB 731- Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for HB 731. If enacted, this bill would create a Maryland Connectivity Coalition to identify and advance priority wildlife crossing projects that, among other benefits, will reduce habitat fragmentation for threatened and endangered species. The bill establishes a Wildlife Connectivity Fund to help leverage non-state support and to ensure future funding supports projects aligned with the goals of the bill.

Saving wildlife and habitats is one of the National Aquarium's three overarching conservation goals. Increasing habitat connectivity is one key solution to address the ongoing biodiversity crisis, especially when policies include special consideration for threatened and endangered species as this bill does. Roads and other paved surfaces create habitat fragmentation, hindering many animals' ability to feed and reproduce. Maryland's 69,000 miles of paved roads are no exception. Many species, including reptiles and amphibians, face the risk of mortality from road crossings during their overland migrations. Examples include wood turtles, semi-aquatic rainbow snakes, and the Eastern tiger salamander which migrates from woodlands in early spring and often travels over roads to reach breeding ponds. In addition to promoting sustainable improvements to Maryland's transportation infrastructure, this bill will ultimately assist species conservation efforts that help wildlife most in need.

This legislation also directs Maryland DNR to establish the Wildlife Connectivity Fund to invest in wildlife crossing infrastructure along with research needed to help determine the best locations for crossing locations. Such a fund will also allow the state to maximize investments in wildlife connectivity. Additionally, this fund would further advance the impacts of a recent grant SHA received to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by accepting private donations to the Fund through the MVA Vehicle Registration Portal and directly through a Fund website. In doing so, this bill would leverage growing public support for protecting wildlife and create another opportunity for citizens to directly contribute to wildlife conservation efforts in Maryland.

Strategically addressing habitat connectivity throughout the state will benefit several threatened, endangered, and other imperiled species. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 731.**

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