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February 27, 2026

To: Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

From: Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 781, CHERISH our Communities Act

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of SB 781. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Audubon enthusiastically supports the CHERISH Act because it will protect vulnerable communities from the negative impacts of polluters while supporting a cleaner environment for the people and birds of every community in Maryland.

Audubon works with communities in South Baltimore and the Lower Eastern Shore to restore important habitat, improve parks, and enhance public gathering spaces. We see firsthand the environmental justice disparities and negative public health impacts of pollution that these communities face at much higher rates than other communities. Audubon believes the CHERISH Act's proposed changes to environmental permitting to provide adequate environmental impact assessment and opportunities for public participation for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits that are issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) will improve the lives of residents in communities across the state, and in particular those communities that have bared the brunt of environmental and public health burdens. The additional benefits to the broader environment will include cleaner water and air which positively impact bird habitat and the ecosystems which we all depend on.

Audubon supports the CHERISH act because Audubon believes in equitable environmental justice for every community in Maryland. Audubon believes everyone in Maryland deserves access to clean air and water, and healthy outdoor spaces. We believe the CHERISH Act is a necessary step to protect Marylanders while keeping our state a leader in environmental planning and environmental justice.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of SB 781.

Thank You,

Jim Brown
Policy Director
Audubon Mid-Atlantic