

BENJAMIN BROOKS
Legislative District 10
Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee
Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 431
Fish and Wildlife - Endangered and Threatened Species and Migratory Birds - Regulations, Lists, Petitions, Essential Habitats, and Takings
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 17, 2026

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 431, Fish and Wildlife – Endangered and Threatened Species and Migratory Birds – Regulations, Lists, Petitions, Essential Habitats, and Takings. The purpose of this bill is to affirm Maryland’s commitment to protecting endangered and threatened species by updating Maryland’s Code to reflect longstanding federal protections and existing regulations.

Protecting Maryland’s diverse wildlife and native plant life is vital to the health and resilience of our ecosystems. Preserving current protections is essential to preventing further declines among endangered and threatened populations. Even the loss of one species can disrupt ecological balance, weaken natural systems, and trigger cascading impacts on biodiversity.

Proposed federal rules and legislation threaten the Endangered Species Act, a law enacted in the 1970s. Maryland cannot undo any federal changes to endangered species protections. However, we can codify these long-established provisions. SB 431 ensures that Maryland law reflects the protections our state and country have maintained for decades.

SB 431 codifies federal criteria for listing and delisting threatened and endangered species, adopts the federal definition of “threatened species,” incorporates Maryland’s existing regulatory definition of “harm,” and maintains federal protections for migratory birds under state law.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are leading drivers of extinction. In light of proposed federal rule changes that weaken habitat safeguards for protected species, SB 431 directs the Secretary of Natural Resources to periodically update its list of Irreplaceable Natural Areas and allowing the Secretary to designate essential habitats for endangered and threatened species.

Authorizing the Secretary to maintain an accurate list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plant species, while preserving existing conservation regulations, ensures that Maryland can continue to protect the State’s biodiversity.

For these reasons, I am respectfully requesting a favorable report on Senate Bill 431.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Benjamin Brooks