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Feb 9, 2026

To: Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Guyton and members of the Maryland House Committee on Environment and Transportation

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland HB 331 Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program (The Bottle Bill)

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 331 (The Bottle Bill). 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. Along with the undersigned, independent Audubon Chapters in Maryland we enthusiastically support HB 331.

Science tells us birds are in decline. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. The role that plastics pollution plays in their decline cannot be overlooked. Birds inadvertently feed on plastic (including bottles, and pieces of bottles) floating on the water, mistaking it for food. This leads to death and even the death of their young. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that for many bird species, plastic can be confused for food. NOAA asserts that from 1962-2012, nearly 60% of sea bird species had ingested plastic, and feed it to their young. Many organisms use plastic litter including bottles as shelter. This can further attract birds, as they graze on the surface of the sea or shorelines. Once ingested, plastics can block birds' throats and stomachs, create a false sense of being full, and even puncture their organs, eventually leading to illness, or death. Once plastics enter our ecosystems or food chains, all wildlife, and humans are exposed to microplastics.

In addition to the direct harm to birds and people, plastics pollution from bottle litter negatively impacts the water that humans and birds depend on, and when incinerated or broken down in landfills they make our air hazardous. These public health hazards present significant challenges, but they also negatively impact the quality of life for Maryland's residents and for wildlife as bottle litter accumulates "downstream" in our most vulnerable human communities. In Maryland's natural environment, "downstream" also means our most sensitive ecological and cultural zones of coastlines, stream valleys and estuaries.

States with similar bottle refund and recycling policies have reduced beverage container litter by as much as 84%. Audubon believes this is an important bill to reduce the harmful effects that plastics

pollution has on both birds and people. It will hold Maryland up as a leader in pollution reduction, environmental conservation and improved public health.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of House Bill 331.

Thank You,

Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Lisa Garrett, President, Prince George's Audubon Society

Julie Dunlap, Advocacy Chair, Audubon Society of Central Maryland

Hugh Simmons, President, Chesapeake Mid-Atlantic

Ben Springer, Advocacy Chair, Southern Maryland Audubon Society