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**The Maryland House of Delegates**  
**Committee on Environment and Transportation**

**HB0204 Complaints, Inspections, and Enforcement – Information Maintenance and Reporting**

**Position: Support**

Maryland needs a better process for recording complaints that involve environmental or natural resources violations. At a time when unfettered violations of our environmental laws are widespread, Maryland communities have every right to know where such laws are being broken and by whom. For this reason, Audubon Maryland-DC asks you to vote HB0204 out of committee and onto the floor. We are one of 22 state programs of the National Audubon Society with approximately 19,000 members in Maryland.

Since 2002, staffing at Maryland state agencies has been cut by 6,500 positions, which has led to dramatic decreases in environmental agencies' ability to provide the public accountability and transparency of their enforcement activities. These reductions in environmental staffing at state agencies and ill-advised policy changes have limited the ability of staff to complete enforcement actions and hold polluters accountable. Noncompliance rates are as high as 70 percent for several state-regulated federal programs. Loss of significant bird and other wildlife habitat has largely been the result.

Beyond a reduction in the ability of the agencies to undertake enforcement actions, the agencies acknowledge that this dramatic reduction in staffing also has substantially limited their ability to respond to public complaints of environmental violations. This not only results in a failure to serve the public, but it also hinders the rights of Marylanders to assist in identifying and stopping harm to birds and other wildlife.

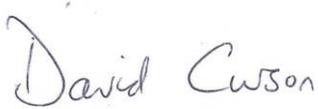
To remedy this problem, this commonsense bill would require MDE and DNR to publish and maintain a website with information regarding complaints, inspections of facilities, and enforcement actions that have been initiated by the two agencies as well as information on the status of permits. It's also notable that the bill will significantly cut down on the amount of Public Information Act requests these agencies must respond to, thus saving staff time and taxpayer money.

The need for greater access to environmental enforcement data could not be clearer. Not only has the level of enforcement of our environmental laws declined at EPA, the number of actions taken by MDE to enforce the Clean Water Act and state water pollution control laws has declined by 85% percent in recent years. The need for laws such as this one is laid bare when the state proves unwilling or incapable of doing the job itself.

Maryland's birds are already in enough trouble. Laws to protect them will remain meaningless without enforcement measures to back them up. For the sake of the state's birds, environment, communities, and our public health, we strongly urge your favorable report on HB0204.

Sincerely,

David Curson, PhD

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Curson". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Director of Bird Conservation  
Audubon Maryland-DC