



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 62- LAND USE- PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANIES- POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY VEGETATION
MANAGEMENT

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

Populations of wild bees and other pollinators such as butterflies, wasps, moths, flies, birds, bats, and small mammals are in sharp decline. These pollinators play an important part in many vital ecosystem services such as maintenance of ecosystem health, wild plant reproduction, crop production, and -preeminently- food security.¹ Mounting evidence suggests that increasing habitat even in urban, suburban, and agricultural landscapes can boost struggling pollinator populations- this includes the millions of acres beneath electric transmission lines in the US.²

Currently in Maryland, less than five percent of the state's 2,000 miles of power lines are managed for pollinators. This bill allows electric utilities to create pollinator-friendly meadows underneath their power lines- utilizing this vast network of space to address loss of pollinator habitats in Maryland. Specifically, the bill prohibits counties and municipalities from enforcing their "weed" height ordinances in powerline corridors.

This legislation aligns with precedents already in practice in Maryland.

- In 2016, the MGA enacted MD's Pollinator Habitat Plan Act which mandated creation of pollinator habitat in state parks and along state roads.
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources already cooperates with utilities to provide pollinator habitat where power lines cross state parks, forests, and wildlife areas.
- BGE already manages sections of its power lines as meadows on federal, state, and county parkland where they support 146 species of native bees and 40 species of butterflies.
- In Prince George's County, just a quarter-mile segment of Pepco powerline, managed as meadow, supports 97 species of native bees.

In order to protect our food security³ and to support pollinator resurgence we must take urgent action to expand habitat for pollinators. Therefore, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 62.

¹ Potts et al., *Nature*, 2016. <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature20588>

² Russel et al., *Biodiversity Conservation*, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10531-018-1552-8>

³ List of Pollinated Foods. <https://www.pollinator.org/pollinated-food>