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February 9, 2023

To: Maryland House of Delegates Economic Matters Committee

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland **House Bill 0062 Land Use – Public Service Companies – Pollinator-Friendly Vegetation Management**

Good Afternoon. My name is Jim Brown. I am the policy director for Audubon Mid-Atlantic, here in Maryland. 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 Mid-Atlantic enthusiastically supports HB 62 with amendments because it provides for the dual location of utility corridors with important ecosystem enhancements. The amendments we speak limit the use of pesticides, and when necessary, require the least harmful pesticide available. Specifically, this bill protects birds. What is good for pollinators is good for birds. And What is good for birds is good for all of us.

The Avian Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. Utility corridors offer us a solution. 1/3 of eastern forest bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. Grassland and Shrubland birds such as Eastern Towhee and Brown Thrasher are disappearing even faster. These species require meadow and shrub conditions that HB 62 will allow in what is currently fragmented habitat. Enabling these “edge meadows,” provides critical landscape diversity for birds to nest, rest, breed, and feed.

Iconic birds such as – the Wood Thrush, American Kestrel, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark and Blue Grosbeak which are in decline across Maryland will benefit from this bill, as will people that get to see them. This is proven to be true here in Anne Arundel County on a powerline managed by USFWS as habitat. Over 120 species of birds use a BGE powerline crossing the South River Greenway including the declining Field Sparrow, Prairie Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

The Science tells us:

- Eastern habitat is becoming increasingly fragmented
- Fragmentation leads to lower productivity in bird populations
- Restoring power line right-of-ways to a more natural state, will increase bird habitat

HB 62 allows jurisdictions to address ecological challenges by preserving our utility grid, WHILE integrating beneficial uses to make Maryland a leader habitat conservation, ecosystem preservation, and the protection of birds now and in the future.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

Thank You,

Jim Brown

Policy Director

Audubon Mid-Atlantic