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March 2, 2023

To: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland **SB526 Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention**

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 SB526 because it will protect one of Maryland's most important resources, our forests. Specifically, this bill protects birds. What is good for birds is good for all of us. This bill addresses the significant forest loss in our rapidly growing communities, by allowing local government solutions to protect forest and grow tree canopy coverage while meeting local development needs.

The Avian Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. 1/3 of eastern forest bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. The rapid declines in birds signal the intensifying stresses that wildlife and people alike are experiencing in Maryland because of habitat loss and environmental degradation.

Taking action on forest protection brings back birds and delivers a cascade of benefits that improve climate resilience and quality of life for all Marylanders. When we restore forest, we filter our water, we sequester carbon, and create habitat for birds. Iconic birds such as – the Baltimore Oriole, Wood Thrush, American Kestrel, Brown Thrasher, Yellow Warbler, which are in decline across Maryland will benefit from this bill, as will people that get to see them.

The Science tells us:

- Maryland forests are becoming increasingly fragmented and diminished
- Fragmentation and forest loss leads to lower productivity in bird populations
- Restoring Maryland's forests will increase bird habitat and overall bird population health across our state.

SB526 will preserve and increase Maryland's tree canopy coverage, improve water quality in the our waterways, and support local community development in an eco-friendly way. SB526 will hold up Maryland as 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

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