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February 22, 2023

**To:** Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee

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

**Subject:** Favorable Testimony for Maryland **HB0631 *Natural Resources -Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)***

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 the Maryland the Beautiful Act. Specifically, this bill protects birds and it protects our unique landscapes for future generations of Marylanders to benefit from. This bill is good for birds. It is good for people. And it is good for the dynamic ecosystems that make Maryland a special place.

The 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. Grassland and Shrubland birds such as eastern towhee and brown thrasher are disappearing even faster. On the Eastern Shore the endangered salt marsh sparrow is losing critical habitat each year. HB 631 will slow this habitat loss by ensuring the protection of at least 30% of Maryland's land by 2030.

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. But HB 632 is not just for the birds. Protected lands in the form of parks and preserves provide people with respite, recreation, and public health benefits. These protected lands also support local economies throughout the state through ecosystem services, hospitality, tourism and associated industries. Protecting more land in Maryland is also an investment in a future defined by climate change. We know that protected forests, grasslands, wetlands, and coastal marshes sequester carbon, slow flooding, filter water, and buffer vulnerable communities from increasing risks of climate change related storm events and sea level rise.

The Science tells us:

- Habitat in Maryland is becoming increasingly fragmented and lost

- Habitat loss and fragmentation leads to lower productivity in bird populations and increases the impacts of climate change
- Protecting and conserving land in Maryland will protect vulnerable bird populations, mitigate the impacts of a changing climate, and make Maryland's landscapes more accessible to people across the state

HB 631 will strengthen Maryland's economy, create a more resilient environment, and deliver better public health outcomes to our residents and visitors. It will also continue to hold Maryland up as a leader in 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

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