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**Committee: Economic Matters**

**Testimony on: HB 1006 “State Highway Administration – Vegetation Management – Pollinator Habitat Plan”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: March 3, 2023**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB 1006, which would significantly increase habitat for pollinators by reducing the required frequency of mowing along nearly 18,000 miles of state roads. The bill helps address declining populations of pollinating insects – such as bees and butterflies – that are essential to our fruit and vegetable crops and to nearly 90 percent of our wild trees, shrubs, and flowers.

In North America, nearly a third of all bumblebee species are threatened with extinction, as are twenty percent of butterflies. In Ohio, the number of butterflies counted in any one year has dropped by one third over 21 years.<sup>1</sup> In California, the monarch butterfly population dropped by a staggering 99 percent over the last 40 years. A major cause of these declines is loss of the kinds of habitats that these pollinators require: open meadows and grasslands.

In 2016, the Maryland addressed these declines by enacting the Pollinator Protection Act, which required three state agencies to develop plans to increase pollinator habitat on their lands. As part of that effort, the Department of Transportation’s State Highway Administration (SHA) commissioned a study to determine whether vegetation along state roadways could be managed in such a way as to provide pollinator habitat.

This three-year study on state roadsides in Frederick and Carroll Counties showed that a single annual mow in fall and selective application of herbicides enables roadsides to support significantly higher flower diversity and bee abundance than does the frequent mowing currently used. In the study, areas managed for pollinators supported 68 species of native plants and 83 species of native bees, almost half of the known bees in either county. The study concluded that these practices show “great potential in supporting pollinators” and are “are timely and practical to implement on a landscape scale.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [“Butterflies are disappearing in Ohio. Here’s what that means for insects everywhere.” PBS News Hour, July 9, 2019.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Kuder, Lisa, \*Evaluating Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management \(IRVM\) Techniques to Improve Pollinator Habitat\* \(State Highway Administration and Department Of Entomology, University Of Maryland, 2019\).](#)

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

HB 1006 has the potential to fix this problem by requiring SHA to develop a pollinator habitat plan specifically for roadsides, to complement their current plan, which involves only properties around rest stops, welcome centers, and office buildings.

The bill also requires SHA to engage in educational efforts to help overcome public reservations about unmowed roadsides through educational signage and engagement with neighboring communities, as recommended in the SHA's 2019 study. Finally, this bill preserves SHA's authority to apply frequent mowing whenever there is concern traffic safety.

We believe this bill has outstanding potential for being a true "win-win" for our state: benefiting the environment and valuable species while simultaneously reducing costs faced by SHA and taxpayers. We urge the Committee to support this bill and recommend its passage by the General Assembly.

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