



Maryland Office
2901 E. Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD 21214

February 19, 2024

To: Chair Korman and members of the Maryland House Committee on the Environment and Transportation

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

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland HB 729 Vernal Pools Wetland Protection Act of 2024

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 729. 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. We work with partner organizations, government agencies, and local communities to protect birds and the places they need to survive now, and into the future.

Adopting regulations to identify, protect and preserve vernal pools in Maryland is sound practice for conservation planning, bird conservation, and diverse ecosystem management. By protecting vernal pools HB 729 will strengthen the state's network of landscapes that are critical to the survival of resident and migrating birds. Vernal pools in Maryland provide hawks, ducks, egrets, herons and other birds with important seasonal food and water sources. However, vernal pools, are not just for the birds. They also filter our groundwater, slow stormwater runoff providing benefits to our human communities and cultural landscapes. They also provide habitat, food, and water to countless other reptiles, amphibians, and beneficial insects, which all contribute to robust ecosystem services in Maryland.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. By putting protections in place that identify and prioritize important bird areas, such as vernal pools, Maryland will be setting a standard of land-use planning that will bring added protections to birds and all of the co-benefits that birds bring us. It will hold Maryland up as a leader in the protection of birds now and in the future.

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

Thank You,

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