



Testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB178– Pollinator Habitat Plan –Requirements for State Highway Administration

January 31, 2024

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB178** on behalf of ShoreRivers and the organizations listed below. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with more than 2,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

This bill will require the State Highway Administration to improve and increase the amount of viable habitat for pollinator species in roadside areas by developing a Pollinator Habitat Plan. Pedestrian and motorist safety will be factored into this plan to ensure that these plantings do not adversely impact the safety of state roads. A major component of this bill will be a focus on outreach and educating visitors, residents, and local officials on the need for this type of restoration and the value it creates for the local environment. Federal funds are available for the installation of these types of practices, so this effort will not have a high fiscal note.

Annual reports released by the State Highway Administration show that about 66% of state traffic travels on state roads and 17% of the roadways in the state are owned and operated by the state. This means there is significant restoration potential along these roadways, and a tremendous amount of people who travel on these roads who will be educated about these practices through signage and other outreach means.

At a time when available habitat for pollinators is decreasing every day, Maryland needs to provide as many incentives and protections as possible for any person or agency to prioritize the critical habitat restoration of native plant species. **These habitat areas also provide a major benefit to local water quality by reducing erosion, trapping sediment and nutrients from entering our waterways, and cooling rainfall before it enters local creeks and streams.** Recent studies have shown that 54% of the lower 48 states have been developed and 41% of our land is in agricultural use, leaving only 5% of the country as undisturbed, “natural” areas. With thousands of species at risk of extinction within the next few decades due to habitat loss and fragmentation, Marylanders need to protect and restore as much land as possible for pollinator species through the use of native plants.

We support this bill as it increases native plants, habitat areas, and public outreach surrounding these issues, we and urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB178**.

Sincerely,

Zack Kelleher

Sassafras Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

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