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Committee: Health and Government Operations and Appropriations

Testimony on: HB6 “Energy-Conserving Standards (Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 8, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges support for HB6, which will require the Department of General Services to promulgate standards for state buildings to better protect Maryland’s bird population while saving energy. In 2020, Howard County became the first county in Maryland to pass legislation addressing this issue. Minnesota (2013) and Illinois (2021) have passed statewide legislation. The latter is most similar to HB6, which requires bird safe building design in new and renovated state owned buildings.¹ Many other localities have also passed legislation, including New York City, Madison, WI, Minneapolis, MN, Portland, OR, Washington, DC, as well as many cities in California and Canada.² The Washington, DC council has recently passed stronger legislation that is awaiting the Mayor’s signature.

Maryland has a rich diversity of birds with over 450 documented species, which is over half of the birds documented in the United States; 72 of these species are rare, threatened, or endangered.³ Maryland is located along the Atlantic flyway, through which billions of birds migrate seasonally.

One billion birds die each year by collision with glass in America, and research and practice show us that these deaths are preventable. The buildings we construct (or significantly renovate) can and should use bird-friendly design.

Importantly, with this bill, buildings become more energy efficient. While well-placed windows are critical to building design and allow for natural lighting, making windows increasingly larger is detrimental to overall energy efficiency. Windows are the weakest link in the building envelope⁴, therefore the greater the surface area of windows in a building, the more energy is needed to keep it cool in the summer and warm in the winter. In state-owned buildings, taxpayers are paying for extra heating and cooling costs. This extra energy use comes at a cost to the environment by contributing to climate change when it relies on fossil fuels.

In sum, incorporating bird-friendly design will save energy and protect birds. Maryland should take this first step by adopting HB6.

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¹ <https://gl.audubon.org/news/new-law-will-protect-illinois-birds-deadly-building-collisions>

² <https://abcbirds.org/glass-collisions/existing-ordinances/>

³ https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/mdbirds.aspx#:~:text=Over%20450%20bird%20species%20have,or%20a%20handful%20of%20times.

⁴ <https://www.energy-manager.ca/windows-the-weakest-link/>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.