



**Maryland Office**  
2901 E. Baltimore St  
Baltimore, MD 21214

June 16, 2024

**To:** Baltimore City Council: Health, Environment and Technology Committee

**From:** Audubon Mid-Atlantic

**Subject: Favorable Testimony for Council Bill 23-0367 Gas-Powered Leaf Blower Ban**

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of Baltimore City Council Bill 23-0367. 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. Council Bill 23-0367 will help the city of Baltimore join over 100 other American cities in phasing out polluting gas-powered garden equipment for the benefit of residents' air quality, Baltimore's wildlife, and our broader climate and environment. Supporting Council Bill 23-0367 will help Baltimore meet the goals in the recently adopted Baltimore Climate Action Plan, Sustainability Plan, and as a signatory of the Urban Bird Treaty Program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Gas-powered leaf blowers, more so than other gas-powered equipment or vehicles produce significant air and noise pollution. Using a commercial gas-powered leaf blower for one hour emits as much pollution as driving a car for 1,100 miles, almost four times as much as operating a commercial lawn mower for the same amount of time. These pollutants include fine particulate matter, which lead to a wide range of health issues from asthma and mental health problems to cancer and premature deaths. Nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, the main ingredients in smog; Carbon dioxide, the leading contributor to climate change; as well as benzene, 1,3-butadiene, and formaldehyde, all toxic, are among the gaseous cocktail in these machines' exhaust. The humans who operate these machines are often hourly workers with limited access to healthcare. Baltimore's residents and workers deserve better air quality, especially when there are effective and affordable alternatives available.

Air pollution and climate change harm more than just Baltimore's human residents. Climate change is also the single greatest threat to birds, whose populations have plummeted by almost 3 billion since 1970. Numerous studies show that birds are significantly affected by noise, including while trying to attract mates via song, establish nests, or listen for predators. Noise pollution can increase birds' stress levels, reduce their body size and feather growth, lower their hatching success, and ultimately reduce their life span. This comes from studies compiling over 3 million observations of 140 different species across North America, as well as several international studies. As a result of human-caused noise pollution, birds were seen to delay nesting, particularly for species with lower-frequency songs, which are more difficult to hear among background noise. Another study showed that chicks born in the noisiest places in a city were smaller than those from parents who bred without noise. And, blood samples of fledged adolescent birds showed changes in their chromosomes that are associated with reduction in life span. Adolescence in birds is a crucial time for learning how to communicate with each

other, which is more difficult in a noisy environment. Several areas of Baltimore City provide critical migratory stopover habitat for over 200 bird species twice each year, and nesting sites for a documented 137 species that breed in Baltimore.

Luckily, electric and battery-powered lawn equipment is both effective, affordable, and easy to find at local retailers. Electric lawn equipment saves money over time, without the need to purchase gasoline or maintain the engine. Consumer Reports shows that an average-price electric lawn mower, for example, is guaranteed to save money over five years compared to a similarly priced gas model. In performance, Consumer Reports noted that the best electric models of leaf blowers earned scores identical to the best gasoline models.

Baltimore City Council Bill 23-0367 will create the groundwork for reducing the threats that birds and people face as a result of pollution. The law will hold Baltimore up as a leader in conservation planning for healthy ecosystems, protecting birds now and into the future.

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

Thank You,

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Policy Director  
Audubon Mid-Atlantic

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Audubon Mid-Atlantic