For Immediate Release

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Advocates Urge House of Delegates to Pass Strong Pollinator Habitat Bill

\textit{Bill would prohibit pesticides that harm pollinators in designated State pollinator habitat lands}

Annapolis, MD (April 6, 2017) – As Sine Die approaches, advocates are urging the Maryland House of Delegates to pass \textit{SB 386}, which would prohibit pesticides known to harm pollinators on designated state pollinator habitats, and resist any weakening amendments on the House floor. This would make the bill consistent with action the Maryland General Assembly took last year, when it became the first legislature in the country to restrict consumer use of \textit{neonicotinoid} pesticides.

“Pollinators should be safe in the habitat that Maryland creates for them,” said Bonnie Raindrop, legislative chair of the Central Maryland Beekeepers Association. “We urge House members to pass the Senate bill with no further amendments.”

The bill amends last year’s Pollinator Habitat Plans law, sponsored by Delegate Steve Lafferty (District 42A), which requires the State Highway Administration and Maryland’s Departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Services to establish a pollinator habitat plan for lands owned or managed by that agency. Advocates say lack of sufficient habitat is a key factor in declining pollinator health.

This year’s bill would ensure designated state pollinator habitats do not use pesticides labeled as toxic to pollinators or use seeds or plants treated with a \textit{neonicotinoid} pesticide. Current amendments to the bill allow exceptions for public health emergencies and give state agencies freedom to designate which of their lands are protected pollinator habitat and which are not.

A preponderance of research confirms that neonicotinoid (“neonic”) pesticides kill and harm bees, birds, butterflies and other pollinators. Other pesticides are also known to be toxic to pollinators, as well. Proponents of the bill say lower-toxicity alternatives to neonics are widely available, and many neonic-free plants and seeds are no more expensive than plants treated with neonics.

“Maryland is a leader in protecting bees and other pollinators, which are essential for our food supply,” said Ruth Berlin, executive director of the Maryland Pesticide Education Network. “We can strengthen our commitment by ensuring state pollinator habitats are free of certain toxic pesticides.”

Maryland bees are dying at alarming rates. Maryland beekeepers lost 56 percent of their hives last year, which follows a 61 percent loss in 2015. Experts say annual losses beyond 15 percent are unsustainable for beekeepers.

The federal government is taking similar precautions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service phased out neonic use, and it is now prohibited on national wildlife lands. The National Pollinator Health Strategy, which provides guidance for designed landscapes, advises that “chemical controls that can adversely affect pollinators should not be applied in pollinator habitats” and federal facilities use seeds and plants that do not contain systemic insecticides.
The House version of the bill, sponsored by Delegate Anne Healey (D-22), was hampered by a weakening amendment added in committee. The Senate bill is sponsored by Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam (D-44). With the Senate having passed its version of the bill with a 41-6 bipartisan vote, the House Environment and Transportation Committee voted yesterday to advance the bill to the floor. For more information, view a fact sheet on the bill here.

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The Smart on Pesticides Maryland coalition, spearheaded by the Maryland Pesticide Education Network, works to protect Marylanders and the natural systems we depend upon from the toxic impacts of pesticides. The coalition includes 78 organizations, and institutions representing communities, businesses, health care providers, farmers, environmentalists, waterkeepers, interfaith congregants as well as environmental justice, public health and wildlife advocates.