



**Maryland
Public Health
Association**

Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

SB912 – Climate Crisis and Education Act

Hearing Date: 3/11/20

Committee: Budget & Taxation

Position: SUPPORT

Thank you Chairman Guzzone and members of the Budget & Taxation Committee. We submit this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association to express our support for SB912 – Climate Crisis and Education Act. We appreciate the bill’s directive to establish a Climate Crisis Initiative in the Department of the Environment, with a Climate Crisis Council and Infrastructure Fund, and a stream of a funding for the Kirwan Initiative, by establishing emission limits, fees and dividends.

For decades, scientists have shown that carbon emissions and other toxic outdoor air pollutants (such as ozone, sulfur dioxides, and nitrous oxides) directly lead to negative health affects ranging from headaches, dizziness and heat stress, to reduced lung function, asthma and lung disease, to heart disease, stroke and death.¹ Further, our reliance on fossil fuels for energy and resulting emissions has trapped heat in our atmosphere and increased temperatures across the globe. Maryland is on target to have more days over 104° F, which cause organs to swell, cells to break down, and over time is intense enough to kill outdoor workers. Impacts from climate change also have been found to elevate levels of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorders.² Moreover, as the world gets warmer, ticks, mosquitoes, and other vectors expand their habitats and spread disease for longer periods of time. Vector-borne diseases are expected to intensify if CO₂ levels aren’t controlled. More intense storms with more rainfall also leads to the unavoidable spread of water-borne disease. With all of this, the costs from the impact of climate change on health are projected to cost Maryland hundreds of millions of dollars in health costs alone.³ Climate change is a public health emergency and we need solutions that meet the severity of the challenge.

The International Monetary Fund, among other reputable institutions, have reported that of the many mitigation strategies to reduce fossil fuel CO₂ emissions, carbon taxes are the most powerful and efficient.⁴ The carbon fee and dividend approach in SB912 presents an important step to protect the public health and the economic well-being of Marylanders. We especially appreciate the focus to alleviate the burden on low and middle-income households, who will not only be impacted more severely by the bill, but are also suffering disproportionately from the impacts of climate change. Children are another particularly vulnerable population to the impacts of climate change. To directly link the bill’s benefits to future generations and future environmental stewards, we strongly recommend that efforts will be made to enhance climate, health, and circular economy curriculum for students and teachers benefiting from the Kirwin Initiative, in the same way that tobacco tax dollars supported smoking cessation efforts and helped to dramatically reduced smoking rates. Thank you again for your attention to this matter, and for your support of climate solutions that improve health.

¹ World Health Organization. (Accessed 2020) “How air pollution is destroying our health.” <https://www.who.int/airpollution/news-and-events/how-air-pollution-is-destroying-our-health>

² American Psychiatric Association. (Accessed 2020) “How extreme weather events affect mental health.” <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/climate-change-and-mental-health-connections/affects-on-mental-health>

³ Sgabjar D., Ahsanuddin S., (Oct. 2019) “It’s time for the health care system to reckon with the human costs of climate change.” Health Affairs blog. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20191011.432819/full/>

⁴ International Monetary Fund (Accessed 2020) “Fiscal Monitor: How to Mitigate Climate Change.” <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2019/09/12/fiscal-monitor-october-2019>

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The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.