

SUPPORT FOR HB 1545: Electric Generation Transition from Fossil Fuels – Carbon Dioxide Emissions Rate and Transition Account (Coal Transition)



March 4, 2020

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led group of Catholics from parishes in both the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., who engage in education about, and advocacy based on, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for our common home.*

As Catholics, we see care for God’s creation as part of a broader fabric of social justice that includes priority for the concerns of the poor and their communities—which are often overburdened with pollution and environmentally hazardous facilities—and support for the dignity and basic rights of workers, including the right to economic security.

This integrated set of principles is part of the Church’s official teaching and forms the basis for MCCH’s advocacy, in this session of the General Assembly, for the passage of 5 key pieces of legislation that have been introduced, as bill pairs, in both the House of Delegates and the Senate. **One of these sets of bills that MCCH supports and urges passage of is HB 1545 and its Senate companion, SB 887.** These bills set a firm timetable from 2023 to 2030 for retiring Maryland’s last six remaining coal plants. In addition, they create a Coal Community Transition Plan and Account—governed by many of those who will be most impacted by the power plant closures and supported by a dedicated, protected funding stream. Funding through the Account will be available for worker retraining, filling wage gaps, supplemental retirement security, and supporting the tax-bases of affected localities.

As Catholics, we see this bill’s intent and comprehensive approach as fully consistent with our faith. The pollutants from coal-fired plants directly threaten the health of the poor in overburdened communities (though toxic air emissions and coal-ash waste) and the fabric of Earth’s ecosystems (through carbon dioxide that is the main cause of global climate change). The deliberate timetable set in the bills ensures an orderly transition for our electric supply system and the economic replacement of these facilities. We applaud the bill’s provisions funding worker and community transition, which we see as responsive to key principles of Catholic social teaching.

The support for HB 1545 from grassroots Catholics of all ages and ethnicities across Maryland is evidenced by the attached Petition of Support, signed by over 1,000 Maryland Catholics, including both adult Catholics and students in Catholic schools. This support has broad geographic sweep—from Catholics living in 29 of Maryland’s 47 Legislative Districts.

While not an endorsement of specific legislative proposals, Pope Francis has spoken to the underlying reality addressed by HB 1545 in his landmark encyclical on care for our common home, *Laudato Si’*. He stated that **“We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”** We believe that HB 1545 achieves this important goal in a sensible and just manner, reflecting the fact that renewable energy sources are widely accessible and economic in the United States.

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home strongly supports this important bill and urges the Committee to favorably report it.

* While MCCH represents the understandings and views of Catholic social teaching, and its implications for public policy, held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics, we are not representing ourselves as an official voice of the Catholic Church in state-level public policy, a role that properly belongs to the Maryland Catholic Conference.