

Committee: House Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB 1545

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 3, 2020

My name is Julie Klinger-Luht. I live in Towson and am a mom of two little boys and a public health professional. I've spent my career helping people live healthier lives but hadn't focused on environmental health issues.

That all changed for me on a Wednesday morning in July 2018. That July, it had rained for 2 weeks straight. My husband and I were sleeping. At 6:03 am, we woke up to a loud crash. We checked to see if our kids had fallen out of bed. They hadn't. We went downstairs to look around. Nothing was out of place.

My husband opened the front door and we heard our car alarm going off. We looked outside and saw that a 30,000-pound oak tree had fallen and crushed our car.

I'm really lucky. I have a long commute to work and, that summer, I had been leaving for work at 6am. On Wednesdays I work from home so wasn't up and on my way to work. If this had been a day I commuted to the office, this is the precise time I would have been sitting in my car checking traffic and selecting a podcast.

Everything turned out ok. Insurance paid for the damage. We got a new car.

I've told this story a lot. For the year after it happened, every time I told it I heard myself talking about anxiety and PTSD.

After the tree fell, I started reading about how climate change causes more rain, more intense storms, and the effect climate change is having locally on oak trees. It was clear to me that my tree's demise was a direct result of climate change. My anxiety worsened.

Almost a year later, my husband and I were talking about an article we both read about how we have until 2030 to tackle CO2 in the atmosphere. After that we've missed our chance to turn this around.

We have two little boys. Maddox just turned 4 on Sunday. Perry is 6.5 and in first grade at Stoneleigh Elementary. In 2030, they will both be in high school. It's not that far away.

After this conversation, I was at a loss for how to handle this anxiety about my kids' future. I had several sleepless nights.

Then, not even a week after my husband and I had this conversation, I saw an ad for the Baltimore City Beyond Coal Forum put on by the Sierra Club. I went to the forum and learned about Maryland's 6 remaining coal-fired power plants, my county's "F" rating for air quality, Baltimore's shocking asthma rates, and extent to which coal contributes to climate change.

More importantly, I learned about the solution. I learned there was a campaign in place to close these coal-fired plants, while providing job retraining and a safety net for workers.

Through the Beyond Coal Campaign, I found a way to channel my anxiety toward positive change and ultimately volunteered to be the volunteer co-lead for this campaign.

I've learned so much about coal and its astronomical effects on pollution and climate change through volunteering on this campaign. Maryland needs to follow New York, Washington State, and New Mexico, and close coal power plants and move toward clean renewable energy. We need to move Maryland Beyond Coal this year. We are out of time to waste.

I wholeheartedly support this legislation. As a public health professional, a mom, and a Baltimore County voter, I ask you to move this legislation forward.