

Testimony In Support of FUTURE Act

Chairwoman McIntosh and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for taking the time to review my testimony. My name is Nina Jeffries and I am a native Marylander. I grew up in Takoma Park, went to school in Silver Spring, and now live in College Park. I am a junior at the University of Maryland (UMD) earning a double degree in Arabic and Environmental Economics. On campus I am a Peer Mentor, a member of the Student Government Association, Chair of the Sustainability Fund Review Committee, and am raising a seeing-eye-dog for a regional non-profit organization. I have interned with the UMD Arboretum and the U.S. Department of Justice and last summer I worked at a farm in Temple Hills and interned at an environmental law firm. This winter I started my thesis project which investigates intersections of environmental justice and environmental law. After I graduate, I hope to go to law school and study a mix of civil rights, constitutional, and environmental law.

Climate change is terrifying. I am here today because I have a responsibility to do everything in my power to mitigate the effects of our changing climate, to protect our state and the people who live in it. I am here today to use the power I have as a voter, activist, and student. The FUTURE Act will put our universities on an appropriate carbon neutrality deadline and it ensures that a portion of purchased offsets will secure co-benefits for the state. Beyond the benefits that the bill would bring the state as a whole, the bill aims to support students in specific ways.

By requiring at least one dedicated sustainability staff and regular meetings to share best practices and strategies, we hope that each school will grow to have a robust group of sustainability staff. The University of Maryland's Office of Sustainability is loved by students. It was formed in 2007 primarily to help the university meet the University Presidents' Climate Commitment but it has grown to much more than that. The Office helped create the Sustainability Studies minor (now one of the largest minors on campus), supports paid internships for undergraduates, and jobs for recent graduates. Through partnerships with the Department of Transportation, Dining, and Facilities Management, the Office has helped create programs that support commuters, reduce food and waste related emissions, and educate students about the impact of their on-campus activities. As an independent body, the Office runs their successful "Green Terp" Program and gives educational workshops on topics of energy efficiency and consumption, waste reduction, and waste diversion.

Sustainability staff are a fantastic student resource. The delegates in our coalition (MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition) who have sustainability staff sing their praises. These staff have provided us with valuable insight as we developed our bill and they helped us connect with other energy and environmental experts. In the SGA, I can't think of many issues in the Sustainability Committee that we didn't look to partner with or seek input from the UMD Office of Sustainability. For example, for several years students have been interested in raising the

sustainability fee (it's been \$3 since 2010). This year we're looking to get the fee increased so the Sustainability Fund can support more projects. The fee and the Fund were started by the Office of Sustainability with student support. The Office of Sustainability is gathering input from other departments and the SGA is gathering student input, we plan to work together to determine an appropriate fee increase. The fund offsets undergraduate commuting emissions, provides funds for the SGA to give out mini-grants for smaller sustainability projects, and the remainder is available for faculty, staff, researchers, and students to apply for project funding. Without UMD's sustainability staff who advocated for the Fund, it is unlikely that UMD would be able to support such a wide range of projects that support student learning, improve campus operations, and novel sustainability research.

The Sustainability Fund has always enjoyed a high level of student, faculty, and staff support. Some funded projects are research oriented like a \$45,000 grant for the Geography Department to study carbon capture in campus-owned forests, some projects support the physical campus like a \$25,000 grant to support a novel high-efficiency HVAC system based on weather forecasting in the Student Union, and others support student learning and community outreach like a \$13,500 grant to a student group to find engineering solutions for flooding issues at Lewisdale Elementary School in Prince George's County. The Office reports to the Vice President of Financial Affairs, this close relationship was key in instituting the student fee to support the Sustainability Fund. The Sustainability Fund is just one example of the value of having sustainability staff.

The proximity of the Office of Sustainability to the VP of Financial Affairs was important in establishing the University's Sustainability Council. The Council is chaired by the VP of Financial Affairs and advises the President on UMD's Climate Action Plan. In 2018 the SGA requested that the Council look into moving UMD's carbon neutrality date to 2025. In 2020 the Council endorsed a plan that would allow UMD to be carbon neutral by 2025. This endorsement not only demonstrates how vital sustainability staff is to advancing climate action and lifting student concerns, but it demonstrates that the 2035 date in the FUTURE Act is reasonable, achievable, and forgiving.

We hope if each school has sustainability staff and staff meet between schools regularly, that the sustainability offices can learn from each other. We hope that this will produce stronger initiatives to support students and foster new cross-university relationships and programs. We hope that information sharing will help equalize the abilities of all sustainability staff, despite differences in funding or staffing level.

Students understand the importance of having sustainability staff. UMD's SGA, UMBC's RSA, St. Mary's SGA, Salisbury's SGA, and John Hopkins SGA have all formally supported our bill with letters of support. The The MD Campaign for Environment Human Rights, the Assateague

Coastal Trust, the LSU Climate Pelicans, the Greenbelt Climate Action Network, UMD Sunrise, Go Green OC, the Assateague Coastal Trust, BALTIMORE Blue+Green+Just, Rachel Carson Council, St. Mary's Sustainability Office, and the Chesapeake Climate Action Network support the FUTURE Act as well.

As I said before, I am here because I feel a moral obligation to protect our state. Education is a fundamental part of addressing any social, environmental, or economic issue. By supporting environmental education with sustainability staff we can create greater understanding of climate science, energy consumption, waste systems, and environmental injustices so our public universities can continue to produce well-rounded and well-informed students.

<https://sustainability.umd.edu/sustainability-fund/grant-recipients/weather-technology-hvac-strategy-stamp> - STAMP HVAC Grant

<https://sustainability.umd.edu/sustainability-fund/grant-recipients/lewisdale-elementary-school-flooding-prevention-and-courtyard> - Lewisdale Elementary Grant