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Economic Matters Committee

Chair
Property and Casualty Insurance
Subcommittee

The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Delegate C. T. Wilson
Chairman, House Economic Matters Committee
House Office Building – Room 231
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Mr. Chairman,

I am writing in support of HB 473 and hope to receive favorable support from the House Economic Matters Committee.

HB 473 would require the Department of the Environment (MDE) to deploy ambient air quality monitors to measure the levels of particulate matter and fine particulate matter in fence-line communities.[1]

Particulate matter is a mixture of microscopic solids and liquid droplets suspended in air, typically made of components including acids, organic chemicals, metals, soil or dust particles, and allergens. Air pollution from particulate matter can occur year-round and is linked to serious health concerns.[2] Exposure to particulates can cause lung and heart problems, especially in residents with chronic disease, younger and older people, and overburdened residents. Breathing in fine particles can negatively affect lung function and worsen preexisting conditions like asthma and heart disease.[3] Long-term exposure to particulate pollution has been linked with increased respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions, emergency room visits, and deaths.

In the U.S. people of color and low-income residents inhale more particulate air pollution on average; a study conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) further found that Black, Latino, and Asian residents are disproportionately exposed to particulate pollution.[4] Due

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[1] Law Insider, *fenceline community definition.* (n.d.), https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/fenceline-community (defining a fence-line community as a low-income community or community of color that presents an increased health risk to its residents due to its proximity to a major source of pollution).

[2] Montgomery County Government, *Outdoor Air Pollutants*. Department of Environmental Protection (n.d.), https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/air/outdoor-pollutants.html

[3] New York Department of Health, *Fine Particles (PM 2.5) Questions and Answers*. New York State Department of Health, Air Quality (n.d.), Fine Particles (PM 2.5) Questions and Answers (ny.gov)

[4] United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Study Finds Exposure to Air Pollution Higher for People of Color Regardless of Region or Income*. EPA (Sep. 20, 2021), https://www.epa.gov/sciencematters/study-finds-exposure-air-pollution-higher-people-color-regardless-region-or-income

to a legacy of discriminatory housing policy, racial-ethnic exposure disparities continue to persist.

The Wheelabrator incinerator in Westport, Baltimore is a glaring example of particulate matter pollution in an overburdened and underserved community. The community is disproportionately low-income residents of color, yet the impacts of air pollution from industry in the community is hard to quantify as local air quality monitoring is largely unavailable.

In contrast, the BreatheWell St. Mary's Initiative in St. Mary's County has installed hyper-local air quality monitors to measure particulate and fine particulate matter that contribute to poor air quality and respiratory illnesses.[5] Real-time air quality data is available to residents through an accessible dashboard, and community members can make protective health decisions based on readily available data. A separate project, between the town of Cheverly and the University of Maryland School of Public Health, has created a network of hyper-local air quality sensors. Hyper-local air quality monitors like those in St. Mary's County and Cheverly can help communities address the impacts of air pollution in their neighborhood. Data from the sensors can help identify the extent of particulate matter in an area, inform the community of potential health risks, support air quality standards, and encourage further academic research.[6]

 HB 473 will utilize the same sensors as in Cheverly and incorporates parts of St. Mary's County's program, tracking data from a wide array of local air quality monitors throughout Maryland. The program data would be publicly available and accessible online. Furthermore, MDE would be required to take the air quality data into consideration before approving certain emissions permits. HB 473 would also require the Air Quality Control Advisory Council to conduct a study and make reports related to ambient air quality monitoring to the General Assembly on or before September 2026.

Ambient air quality monitoring helps drive solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful air pollutants to protect public health.[7]

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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[5] St. Mary's County Government, *BreatheWell St. Mary's*. St. Mary's County Health Department (n.d.), BreatheWell St. Mary's - St. Mary's County Health Department (smchd.org)

[6] Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health*, A Hyper-Local Air Monitoring Network for Cheverly, MD*. The University of Maryland, School of Public Health and Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health (n.d.), A Hyper-Local Air Monitoring Network for Cheverly, MD — Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health (ceejh.center)

[7] Governor Kathy Hochul, *Governor Hochul Announces Launch of First Statewide Mobile Air Monitoring Initiative*. New York State Office of the Governor (Jul. 2, 2022), Governor Hochul Announces Launch of First Statewide Mobile Air Monitoring Initiative | Governor Kathy Hochul (ny.gov)

Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo