



Sierra Club Maryland
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Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB473 “Environment – Ambient Air Monitoring – Particulate and Fine Particulate Matter”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club enthusiastically supports HB473. It would require the Department of the Environment (MDE) to deploy ambient air quality monitors to measure levels of particulate matter and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution in overburdened and underserved communities across rural, suburban and urban settings.

Particulate matter pollution is a key environmental health issue. It contributes to various cancers, heart disease, asthma, COPD, severe covid-19, other chronic respiratory diseases, and premature death. Its presence disproportionately and systemically harms Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans in our state because of where it most often is emitted. And its presence also can depress home values, lower job opportunities, and spur poverty in communities. Currently, there are few ground-level air-quality sensors, and fewer still that provide real time data on air quality in a digestible format for the public.

The program proposed by HB473 would prioritize the placement of monitors in all census tracts with a median income at or below 80% of the statewide median income, and the data would be accessible in real time, which would ensure that people are aware of the days and times when air quality is poor, facilitating more informed decision-making.

An important provision of HB473 is that MDE would be required to take the monitoring data into consideration before approving certain emissions permits to ensure that underserved communities don't become further exposed to toxic pollutants. Additionally, requiring a minimum standard of public input and consultation of the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities during the process will lead to better community education and engagement.

In summary, this bill would provide, for the first time, statewide data on the magnitude of particulate matter air pollution in underserved and overburdened communities. The data should enable MDE and other state agencies to make more informed decisions to address this pollution problem which would be good for public health, the environment, and the lives of those now suffering from the pollution. It is important that after enactment, the air quality data is not a wasted opportunity to research and learn. We look forward to seeing the information gleaned from this data and recommend a favorable report on HB473.

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