HB 473: Environment - Ambient Air Monitoring - Particulate and Fine Particulate Matter
House Economic Matters Committee
February 15, 2023

Dear Chair Wilson,

Clean Water Action and Maryland League of Conservation Voters request a favorable report on HB473. HB473 would require the Maryland Department of the Environment to deploy a series of air quality monitors around the state, focused on overburdened and underserved communities. These air quality monitors would measure levels of particulate and fine particulate matter, which is a pollution source of key concern.

As established in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, overburdened communities are those that already above the 75th percentile in three or more environmental health indicators that include air quality indicators; traffic; lead paint exposure; proximity to superfunds, hazardous waste, wastewater discharges, concentrated animal feeding operations, emitting power plants, toxic release inventory facilities, brownfields, mining operations, and hazardous waste landfills; lack of access to broadband; asthma emergency room discharges; myocardial infarction discharges; and low-birth-weight infants. Underserved communities are those where at least 25% of the residents qualify as low-income, at least 50% of the residents identifying as non-white, or at least 15% of the residents have limited English proficiency.

Particulate matter exposure can cause lung and heart problems, especially for those chronically exposed. Study after study confirms that polluting industries are more likely to be sited in communities of color and low-income communities.

HB473 also directs MDE to take into consideration the relevant ambient air monitoring data when they approve permits.

Maryland has a good example of hyper-local air quality monitoring in the BreatheWell St. Mary's Initiative in St. Mary's County. Their network of hyper-local air quality monitors measure the particulate matter that contributes to poor air quality and respiratory illness. Residents are able to access real-time air quality data through an online dashboard and residents may use this data to make health decisions - including when to exercise or play outside. There is a similar project in Cheverly with the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Data from sensors like these can identify the extent of air pollution in an area, support air quality standards that will improve air quality, and encourage further academic research.

This legislation also asks the Air Quality Control Advisory Council to conduct a study and make reports related to ambient air quality monitoring to the General Assembly. The Council is asked

to study how ambient air monitoring data can be used to mitigate toxic pollutants, to have this data be incorporated into permit-making decision processes, to identify federal programs that could fund this program, the cumulative impacts of pollutants on communities, and the difficulties that exist in implementing existing ambient air monitoring programs and their proposed solutions.

HB473 takes immediate action to deploy the network of air quality monitors and will immediately give the State more information available when it makes decisions and its residents more information about the ambient air quality conditions where they live. It also sets the state up to consider this data in permits and pursue how the state can use this information to improve its air quality. For these reasons we urge a favorable report.

Thank you,

Emily Ranson
Clean Water Action
eranson@cleanwater.org
410-921-9229

Rebecca Rehr
Maryland League of Conservation Voters