

Testimony in Support of House Bill 0347 (Delegate Ruth)

Attorney General - Climate Change Actions - Authorization

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 20, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Peña-Melnyk,

Maryland communities are facing an existential threat from climate change. Sea-level rise, increasingly severe storms, flooding, and more frequent and intense heat waves threaten the public health and safety of Maryland's citizens and environment.

Maryland taxpayers are facing greater and greater costs to respond to these disruptions — both in terms of reactive measures like disaster-recovery and proactive measures like resilience and adaptation. For example, according to a 2019 study released by our organization, Maryland can expect to spend nearly [\\$28 billion](#) by 2040 to protect its coastlines from rising seas.

But this crisis wasn't a foregone conclusion. The climate emergency we find ourselves in was created by decades of denial, deception, and disinformation by the fossil fuel industry.

Climate change didn't happen on its own. Studies have found that nearly two-thirds of all greenhouse gas emissions since the beginning of the industrial revolution [can be traced to just 90 individual companies](#). Companies like Exxon, Chevron, Shell, BP, ConocoPhillips, and more. The science is crystal clear. We are not all equally to blame for the emergency we find ourselves in.

These [same companies knew about the impact of burning fossil fuels over 60 years ago](#). Hundreds of internal industry documents uncovered by journalists and researchers show that fossil fuel companies, like Exxon, knew decades ago that burning fossil fuels would raise global temperatures, which would then have disastrous impacts worldwide. By the 1980s, they were predicting, in their own words, globally "[catastrophic](#)" effects.

They even made specific projections about the East Coast. In a [1982](#) memo, Exxon projected flooding up and down the Eastern seaboard, as much of Maryland's coastline now experiences.

Last month, the [first-ever peer-reviewed study](#) of Exxon's internal climate projections was released showing that company scientists predicted the future rate of global

warming with startling accuracy — even as executives publicly sowed doubt about climate science.

Company executives understood that addressing climate change meant limiting carbon emissions, which would hurt the industry's bottom line. So, the oil and gas companies took a page from the Big Tobacco playbook. Like the tobacco companies that denied their products cause cancer and addiction, oil and gas companies spread disinformation about their products' leading role in causing climate change. Documents have revealed a massive coordinated campaign to lie to the public, lawmakers, and the media about the catastrophic impacts they knew their products would cause. They further reveal how the industry spent millions of dollars to block climate action over the last several decades.

In addition to a mountain of internal company documents, Exxon insiders have gone on the record about what the company knew, and what it did with that knowledge. A former scientific consultant [testified](#) under oath before Congress saying, "Exxon was publicly promoting views that its own scientists knew were wrong." The company's top federal lobbyist [admitted](#) this in a recorded interview: "Did we aggressively fight against some of the science? Yes." In 2021, while testifying under oath before Congress, current Exxon CEO Darren Woods and other oil executives even [refused](#) to pledge to stop spending money "on lies" about climate change.

Yet even as these companies undermined science and lied to the public about the role of fossil fuels in perpetuating the climate crisis, the industry took the issue seriously enough to protect their own assets from the impacts of climate change. As early as the 1970s, companies like [Chevron](#) and [Shell](#) were filing patents for equipment that would work in a warming arctic and raising oil rigs to account for sea-level rise.

While the industry's infrastructure may be well protected against the harms caused by climate change, communities in Maryland are now facing staggering costs to adapt to a worsening climate crisis.

So who should be the ones to cover the costs of climate damages? Taxpayers and impacted communities? Or the companies that knowingly created and continue to profit from the climate emergency we are now facing?

The Attorney General's office has a long history of holding bad actors accountable for the damage they have caused to the people of Maryland. Just as tobacco and opioid industries were held accountable for their fraud and deception and the resulting harms

they caused, the fossil fuel industry must not be allowed to escape legal liability and pass off the extraordinary costs of these harms with impunity.

In recent years, eight Attorneys General have taken fossil fuel companies to court to hold them accountable for the costs of their climate lies, including those in Delaware and Washington DC. The plaintiffs in each of these cases have made the following argument: Big Oil companies knew, they lied, and they should be held accountable.

These companies lied and deceived Maryland consumers, policymakers, and the general public, they violated state law, and now Maryland communities are paying the price in the form of taxpayer dollars.

The Center for Climate Integrity supports the authorization of the Attorney General to engage outside counsel on a contingency fee basis in order to hold accountable the companies whose unlawful actions have contributed to climate change and its associated harms. We respectfully request the committee to issue a favorable report on HB0347.

Respectfully,

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