

Testimony on HB 836

Appropriations Committee and House Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: March 6, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Dr. George Samuel supports HB 836

Transportation is Maryland's #1 source of climate pollution, and must be addressed to meet the state's goal of reducing emissions 60% by 2031. The **Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024** will ensure that future transportation projects align with Maryland's goals of reducing climate pollution by expanding transportation options.

HB 836 would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and regional transportation planning agencies to measure and mitigate any increases in climate pollution and vehicle travel (measured as VMT: "Vehicle Miles Traveled") caused by planned highway expansion projects over \$10 million. Mitigation options may include improving and expanding public transportation, creating bike and pedestrian infrastructure, expanding broadband access, or other smart growth strategies. This legislation supports the Maryland [Climate Pollution Reduction Plan's](#) finding that a 20% per-capita reduction in VMT by 2050 is necessary for meeting the state's climate goals.

This bill is of particular interest to me from a professional perspective: I am a physician specialist in pulmonary and infectious diseases, and currently work in research and development in this area. I am well aware of the research literature linking increased particulate matter and other vehicle emissions with increased emergency department admissions for exacerbations of chronic lung conditions such as asthma and emphysema, as well as for heart attacks. These episodes place a great deal of strain on health systems and the health care budget. I have directly witnessed the impact on heavy traffic pollution days on patients presenting to the emergency department with these conditions in my prior professional practice. Though I currently perform research on new therapies to treat and control these conditions, I know elected officials have far greater power to effect positive change in the lives of millions of people by enacting smart policies that reduce vehicular emissions. It is time to stop viewing such policies as lofty "green policies for mother earth", but rather as policies that can have a positive impact on the health care budget.

In addition to reducing climate pollution and having positive health impacts, HB 836 would reduce traffic congestion, save consumers money - an average of \$500 to \$800 per year on vehicle costs - and make smart use of limited infrastructure dollars. With Maryland facing a transportation budget crisis, it's critical to prioritize spending the state's scarce dollars on projects that align with its goals to reduce climate pollution, advance equity, and expand transportation choices.

I strongly urge a favorable report on HB 836

Sincerely,

George Samuel, M.D, MSc.
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