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March 6, 2024

**SUPPORT: HB842 - Environmental Justice - Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects**

Chairs Barnes and Korman and Members of the Committees:

Maryland LCV supports **HB842 - Environmental Justice - Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects**, and we thank Delegate Taveras for her leadership on this issue.

HB842 intends to address environmental justice concerns by advancing equitable distribution of funds and promoting transparency in infrastructure investments. Specifically, the bill requires that State agencies, administering certain federal funds, allocate a minimum of 40% of these funds to infrastructure construction projects in overburdened and underserved communities. An additional 40% should go to projects in communities of color and those with a high percentage of low- to moderate-income households.

Low-income communities and communities of color in Maryland are often subject to the disproportionate burden of pollution, contamination, and underinvestment. HB842 aims to correct the long history of uneven distribution of resources and benefits of funding. With the opportunities ahead to invest federal climate and infrastructure funding, we must pay deliberate attention to ensure equitable and just outcomes. Otherwise, we run the risk of perpetuating inequities in communities covered by this bill, thus undermining Maryland's economic and climate goals.

Communities covered by this bill will, for instance, have heightened funding for weatherization and energy efficiency projects, increase access to clean drinking water, improvement of roads and public transportation, and other critical infrastructure in their communities to have better economic and health outcomes, thus improving their quality of life. Additionally, this bill also thoughtfully promotes change from the bottom up. It calls for public consultations, providing opportunities for communities to shape targeted investments to meet their specific needs.

Maryland LCV strongly supports legislation that advances environmental justice and Justice40 principles. In addition, we would like to raise two considerations to strengthen the bill. While we acknowledge the intent behind establishing the Justice40 Committee, we believe it may be beneficial to include direct representation from overburdened and underserved communities. In addition, we suggest that the duties of the Justice40 Committee be carried out in consultation with the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities to make sure to

streamline efforts. Furthermore, some of the definitions in the bill should include more specificity. It is important to target investment in communities of color, and communities with a high percentage of low- to moderate-income households, but these may be duplicative of metrics already covered in the state definition of “underserved” and some need further clarification in law to effectively and expeditiously implement and direct funds where appropriate (e.g. define ‘high percentage’).

HB842 allocates resources to communities that are under-resourced and dealing with an excess of environmental pollution, health consequences, or lack of access to decision-making. We urge a favorable report on HB842.