

Policy Foundation of Maryland

Committee: Judiciary

Testimony on: HB0516-Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024 (CCEJ)

SPONSOR: Delegate Diana Fennell, Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, Delegate Kevin Harris, Delegate Ashanti Martinez, Delegate Edith Patterson, Delegate Veronica Turner

Organization: Policy Foundation of Maryland, Rebuild Maryland Coalition, MD Legislative Coalition, Climate Justice Wing

Person Submitting: Sarahia Benn (CEO/Executive Dir.)

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 29, 2023 1:00PM

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I express gratitude for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB0516. As representatives of the Policy Foundation of Maryland, our focus lies on advocating for legislation and policies at both the State and County levels that directly impacts Black, Brown, marginalized, low-income communities, and veterans affairs. Environmental legislation holds immense significance for these communities, given their historical and ongoing vulnerabilities.

Carbon pricing stands as a linchpin in the realm of efficient climate policy, championed by economists worldwide. This approach, deeply rooted in economic principles, strives to mitigate emissions while carefully managing costs. The hallmark of carbon pricing lies in its adaptability, allowing market dynamics to shape emission reduction strategies.

Yet, the allure of carbon pricing extends beyond its environmental benefits. The revenue it generates presents a tantalizing opportunity for governments, offering a financial lifeline that can be reinvested in green initiatives and marginalized communities and businesses.

Here, the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ) steps in, providing immediate revenue streams while prioritizing equity to ensure marginalized communities and small businesses keep pace with the transition. Ultimately, this bolsters our existing Climate Solutions Now policy, fortifying it against future challenges.

[Black and Brown and Military/Veteran in Southern Harford and Maryland wide are being exposed to deadly toxins even in a higher percentage than the remainder of the County.](#) In Maryland, Black residents are exposed to 12% higher diesel soot concentrations from on-road transportation than



the average. Latinos experience concentrations 11% higher than the average. At the same time, white residents have an average exposure that is 8% lower than the state average. That's not by accident.

Four reasons the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024 would positively impact marginalized communities:

1. **Protective Benefits for Low- and Moderate-Income Households:** The CCEJ Act allocates revenue from pollution fees to a Benefits Fund, with 80% directed towards low- and moderate-income household benefits. This provision shields vulnerable communities from financial harm associated with transitioning to cleaner energy practices.
2. **Support for Environmental Justice Communities:** At least 50% of the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund, established by the legislation, is designated for projects directly benefiting environmental justice communities. This targeted investment addresses the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalized populations, ensuring equitable access to environmental benefits.
3. **Reduction of Health Disparities:** By incentivizing the reduction of fossil fuel emissions, the CCEJ Act contributes to improved air quality, particularly in communities disproportionately affected by pollution. This reduction in harmful emissions mitigates health disparities, including respiratory illnesses and other health conditions prevalent in marginalized communities.
4. **Job Creation and Economic Opportunities:** The transition to a sustainable, vibrant economy facilitated by the CCEJ Act generates billions of dollars for investment in clean energy infrastructure. This investment not only creates job opportunities in green industries but also provides economic benefits to marginalized communities, including trade-exposed small businesses.

Four financial benefits of the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024:

1. **[Revenue Generation for Clean Energy Infrastructure:](#)** The implementation of pollution fees under the CCEJ Act generates substantial revenue for investment in clean energy infrastructure. These investments drive economic growth and innovation in renewable energy technologies, positioning Maryland as a leader in sustainable development.
2. **Long-Term Economic Stability:** The transition to a sustainable economy, facilitated by the CCEJ Act, promotes long-term economic stability and resilience. By diversifying Maryland's energy portfolio and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the legislation fosters economic growth while minimizing the risks associated with volatile energy markets and climate-related disruptions.

3. **Creation of Green Jobs:** Investments in clean energy infrastructure under the CCEJ Act create job opportunities in green industries, stimulating economic growth and employment. These green jobs contribute to job creation and workforce development, particularly in marginalized communities, supporting inclusive economic prosperity.
4. **Financial Incentives for Emissions Reductions:** The establishment of greenhouse gas pollution fees incentivizes emissions reductions across industries. By internalizing the costs of carbon pollution, the legislation encourages businesses to adopt cleaner technologies and practices, reducing emissions while generating revenue for environmental initiatives and community benefits.

Five more specific beneficial reasons the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024 would positively impact marginalized communities and help tourism:

1. **Green Tourism Initiatives:** The legislation allocates funding for eco-friendly tourism initiatives in environmental justice communities. These projects may include nature-based tourism ventures, such as guided tours of restored wetlands or sustainable agriculture experiences, attracting tourists interested in eco-conscious travel.
2. **Revitalization of Historic Districts:** Funding from the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund can support the revitalization of historic districts within marginalized communities. Preserving and promoting cultural heritage sites not only enhances the appeal of these areas to tourists but also stimulates economic development through heritage tourism.
3. **Promotion of Local Artisanal and Culinary Tourism:** The legislation encourages investments in local artisanal and culinary businesses within marginalized communities. By supporting small-scale producers and food entrepreneurs, the Act fosters unique tourism experiences centered around regional cuisine and cultural traditions.
4. **Climate-Resilient Tourism Infrastructure:** Investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, such as flood defenses and sustainable coastal development, benefit both residents and tourists. By safeguarding popular tourist destinations from climate-related hazards, the Act ensures the long-term viability of Maryland's tourism industry.
5. **Community-Led Sustainable Tourism Projects:** The Act empowers environmental justice communities to lead sustainable tourism projects tailored to their unique cultural and environmental assets. Community-driven initiatives, such as heritage trails or cultural festivals, not only attract tourists but also promote community pride and economic empowerment.

We must urgently address the disproportionate harm faced by Black, Brown, low-income, and veteran communities in Maryland, recognizing that these challenges affect us all. Currently, our children are unable to play outside due to poor air quality, highlighting the urgency of transitioning

to a cleaner, healthier future. The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ) offers immediate revenue solutions, addressing Maryland's financial struggles while prioritizing environmental justice. This legislation has the potential to be transformative, providing economic opportunities and high-paying jobs for marginalized communities and improving the lives of all Marylanders.

For these reasons, I urge an **FAVORABLE REPORT** on **HB0516**.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarahia Benn
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Rebuild Maryland Coalition)

(Dedicated to Black History month)

““We black folk, our history and our present being, are a mirror of all the manifold experiences of America. What we want, what we represent, what we endure is what America is. If we black folk perish, America will perish.””

—[Richard Wright](#), Legendary African American writer, 1941