

HEARING DATE: February 29, 2024
BILL & TITLE: HB0516 - Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEES: Economic Matters & Environment and Transportation
SPONSOR: Delegate Diana Fennell

Dear Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anjali Gulati, I live in district 7A, and I work as a Climate Equity Associate with Interfaith Power & Light DMV.

I have been a long-time supporter of this bill, since I testified the first time in 2020 during undergrad at Morgan State University. With a masters in political economy from Georgetown and background in environmental economics, I strongly advocate for carbon pricing as a solution of just means in Maryland's approach in fighting for climate justice.

The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ) will help meet Maryland's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target of net-zero emissions by 2045, in a just and equitable way by enhancing resilience to climate impacts; demanding accountability from fossil fuel companies by charging them a fee for the damages they are causing; directing half of the revenue from the fee to a benefits fund to help protect low- and moderate-income (LMI) households many of which are headed by women; invest in projects that are directly located within and provide meaningful benefits to disproportionately affected communities; and aid county and municipal governments in funding projects to mitigate GHG and build resilience.

Climate change is an urgent women's health concern as well as a major public health challenge. Continuous exposure to fossil fuels often leads to adverse health effects for women, such as infant mortality, chronic bronchitis, and worsening of cardiac disease. During pregnancy, if a woman has higher exposure to these elements, they have a higher risk of preterm birth, low birthweight, and stillbirth.

These adverse health effects are most consequential to at-risk populations, overburdened and underserved communities, which include a high number of pregnant women and developing fetuses.

Children and teenagers face greater risk of infection, coughing and bronchitis from air pollution.

The [Maryland Department of Health reports](#) that asthma is the most common chronic condition in Maryland school children, affecting more than 60,000 students statewide. African American children in Maryland have almost five times the rate of asthma-related emergency department visits as White children.

Setting new statewide, greenhouse gas emission reduction goals to reach net-zero emissions by 2045, will reduce the negative impacts on the public health, economic well-being, and natural

treasures of the State. This reduction will greatly reduce the negative health effects of women and children.

HB 516 will make polluters pay for the damage they cause by charging a fee that will increase annually until the target reduction is met. Taxpayers will not have to pay. The fossil fuel companies will pay the fee at the point of entry into the state.

The revenue from the fee is currently projected to be at least \$1.7 billion annually. Two funds will be established with the revenue from the fee – the Benefits Fund and the Infrastructure Fund. These funds will be directed to the same vulnerable households and communities including women.

The Benefits Fund will go directly to the pocketbooks of low- and moderate-income households and the African American community that is most affected. They will receive regular rebates to pay their utility bills, put gas in their car, pay for public transportation, pay for their prescription drugs, or spend however they choose.

The other half of the revenue will go to the Infrastructure Fund that will be directed to the same community to help them move into this green environment we are creating. Some people can afford to put solar panels on their roofs, purchase electric cars, protect their homes from flooding, or move to a less polluted community. Some of our citizens cannot. The Infrastructure Fund provides funding to those communities to ensure everyone has a just transition. Women and children living in those communities will qualify for those funds.

Here is some Maryland specific data. The *Maryland Commission for Women's 2021 Maryland Women – A Status Report* indicates that:

- Women and girls represent more than 51% of the population in Maryland (3.1 million women)
- 49% of Marylander's workforce are female
- 60% of minimum wage workers are women
- Women's average earnings are less than men's at every education level (\$58,245 male vs \$44,988 female overall earnings) and (\$106,133 male vs \$75,625 female with graduate degree)
- 23% of single female-headed households with children under 18 live in poverty

For these reasons and more, I urge a FAVORABLE report on HB 516.

Respectfully submitted,

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Cc: Members of the Economic Matters Committee
Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee