

Committees: Economic Matters and Environment and Transportation
Testimony on HB 516, The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act
Organization: Elders Climate Action Maryland
Submitting: Leslie Wharton, Chapter Leader
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 29, 2024

Dear Chairs and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB 516. Elders Climate Action Maryland is our state chapter of [Elders Climate Action](#), a nationwide movement of elders striving for a future where our children, grandchildren, future generations, and all life can thrive. We urge you to vote favorably on HB 516.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to our public health. The health effects include more vector-borne diseases, more heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, injuries from wildfires and extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods, and mental health problems. These issues threaten the lives and health of all Maryland residents, particularly children and the elderly.

One thing that is less often recognized is the close tie between air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. 88% of Maryland residents live in areas that do not meet EPA air quality standards. Air pollution is a major contributor to absences from work and school, increased healthcare costs, and premature deaths. This can be seen clearly in the high rates of hospitalization for asthma in Maryland, especially in Baltimore. Research shows that decreases in air pollution lead to significant and rapid decreases in asthma hospitalizations. Improvements in health, especially in children and people living in overburdened communities, will be the first benefit we see from decreasing the use of fossil fuels.

The CCEJ focuses on reducing these threats by reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide and methane, from fossil fuels used in transportation and buildings.

In 2022, the Climate Solutions Now Act set ambitious and essential greenhouse gas reduction goals. In 2023, Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan gave us a pathway to accomplish those vital goals.

In 2024, we must find the money to make the changes called for in the plan a reality. The CCEJ provides a reliable mechanism to generate the funding Maryland must have to meet those goals.

Beyond finding funds, we must ensure that disproportionately affected communities receive the money they need to solve serious and longstanding problems resulting from fossil fuel use and lack of investment in infrastructure. Those problems include dangerous levels of air pollution, excessive heat amplified by the heat island effect, and inadequate transit.

To meet these needs, the CCEJ takes the innovative approach of creating two funds from the revenue. The Household and Employer Benefit Fund and the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund were created to address both economic and environmental aspects of climate change while creating alignment with the Justice40 Initiative. These funds not only protect disproportionately

affected households and energy-intensive, trade-exposed employers but also invest in the improvement of the health and welfare of our citizens. Including a “polluter pays” provision without passing fees to end-users is crucial to environmental justice and protects our most vulnerable citizens.

The CCEJ would put Maryland on a commonsense, practical pathway toward a sustainable, vibrant economy. It would generate nearly \$18 billion by 2034 for investment in clean energy infrastructure while providing protective benefits to Maryland’s trade-exposed small businesses and its most vulnerable populations: low- and moderate-income residents and overburdened and underserved communities.

We recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for HB516 in committee.