

SAMUEL I. "SANDY" ROSENBERG
Legislative District 41
Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Government Operations and Estates
and Trusts Subcommittee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

RESPOND TO OFFICE INDICATED

□ Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 365
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3297 · 301-858-3297
800-492-7122 Ext. 3297
Samuel.Rosenberg@house.state.md.us

□ District Office
4811 Liberty Heights Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21207
410-664-2646

Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg
Before the House Economic Matters Committee In Support Of
House Bill 1206

Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency – Investment in Disadvantaged Communities

Mister Chair and members of the committee:

Princeville, North Carolina, is believed to be one of the oldest towns in America chartered by freed slaves. There is a proud history dating back to the end of Reconstruction, of survival through grit and perseverance. Princeville lies on the banks of the Tar River. The land was left vacant by whites who thought the flood prone area presented too great a risk of natural disaster. In the post-Reconstruction South, such land was often the best that black Americans could hope for.¹

Despite almost a century and a half of success against great odds, Princeville's story may soon be coming to an end. In the last twenty-one years, two "hundred-year floods" have ravaged the community. The ongoing climate crisis accelerates natural disasters in cities like Princeville. Many of its residents must decide whether to abandon the homes of their ancestors and seek safety further from the flood plains.

Maryland residents are now confronting the same crisis. In historic Ellicott City, decades of climate change denial preclude residents from asking how to save their city. Instead, they are forced to determine which centuries-old structures must be sacrificed to save the rest.² Here in Annapolis, plans are being made for up to 3.5 feet of sea-level rise.³

¹ See, e.g., Jess Bidgood, *A Wrenching Decision Where Black History and Floods Intertwine*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, Dec. 9, 2016.

² See Rebecca Hersher, et. al. *When 1-in-100 Year' Floods Happen Often, What Should You Call them?*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, Originally published on Nov. 7, 2019, Accessed online at <https://apps.npr.org/ellicott-city/>.

³ See Danielle Ohl, *Naval Academy plans to raise seawall as Annapolis sea level rise looms*, THE CAPITAL GAZETTE Dec. 3, 2018. See also "Climate Action Plan (State of Maryland 2008): Report of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change" Accessed online at <https://www.annapolis.gov/DocumentCenter/View/406/Sea-Level-Rise-Presentation-PDF>; Rebecca Hersher, *High Tide Flooding On The Rise, Especially Along the East Coast Forecasters Warn*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, July 10, 2019, Accessed online at

Indeed, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts even more dire outcomes for the capitol city.

“Scientific studies report that over the past 50 years, tidal flooding has risen from an average of only four nuisance flood days per year to nearly 40. NOAA Technical Report, “Sea Level Rise and Nuisance Flood Frequency Changes around the United States” found that Annapolis has experienced a 925% increase in average annual nuisance flooding events during the past 50 years, the greatest increase recorded for any U.S. city. “Encroaching Tides,” a 2014 report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, predicts that Annapolis will experience nearly 200 annual flood days by 2030 and 350 annual flood days by 2040.”⁴

Thus far the state response, especially here in Annapolis, has emphasized the culturally and politically significant development projects such as City Dock.⁵ However, such projects benefit from their already favorable locations. Cultural centers, intended to last through generations, are often located in low-risk areas. In contrast, homes for disadvantaged populations are often relegated to precisely the high-risk places that well-resourced developers can avoid.

Much like in Princeville, Maryland’s disadvantaged populations are being set up to suffer twice – first from relegation to low-value, high risk properties, often directly in the path of the worst consequences of climate change; and second, from the neglect of those well-positioned to help, who instead turn their attention exclusively to “culturally significant” areas.

House Bill 1206 affirms Maryland’s commitment to make environmental policy for the benefit of those likely to suffer the most. This legislation would create a special designation of “disadvantaged communities” based on geographic, public health, environmental hazard, and socioeconomic criteria. The Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities would then consider the effects of environmental policy with specific attention to these communities.

HB 1206 also reaches beyond climate change to address some of the pernicious and lurking environmental problems disproportionately affecting disadvantaged communities. For example,

“12.4 % of Baltimore City adults currently have asthma, compared to 8.4% statewide and 8.6 % nationally. Baltimore City children under 18 years of age also have more than their fair share of asthma, with an asthma prevalence more than twice the national average – 20% vs. 9.4% respectively. Baltimore’s pediatric asthma hospitalization rate is the highest in Maryland and one of the highest in the nation. Asthma accounts for the greatest loss of productivity either through missed work days or school absenteeism. Nationally, it is

<https://www.npr.org/2019/07/10/739466268/high-tide-flooding-on-the-rise-especially-along-the-east-coast-forecasters-warn>.

⁴ ANNAPOLIS | MD, *City Flood Mitigation Project*, <https://www.annapolis.gov/1416/City-Dock-Flood-Mitigation-Project> (Accessed March 3, 2020).

⁵ *Id.*

estimated that 10 million work days and almost 14 million school days are missed each year due to asthma.⁶

House Bill 1206 would help these communities by requiring policymakers to give them the attention they need and deserve.

This legislation is modeled upon New York's recently enacted Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.⁷ That law established a Climate Justice Working Group to identify disadvantaged communities. These disadvantaged communities are guaranteed a minimum of 35 percent of investment from that state's clean energy and energy efficiency funds.

Overlooked and underserved communities, often left out of policy discussions on account of race, wealth, or background, deserve this body's attention and support.

I urge a favorable report.

March 5, 2020

⁶ BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT, *Asthma*, <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/node/454> (Accessed March 3, 2020).

⁷ News Release, Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie, *Assembly Passes Climate Leadership And Community Protection Act*, <https://nyassembly.gov/Press/files/20190620.php>.