



Testimony in Support of House Bill 517
The Maryland Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Health & Justice
House Environment & Transportation Committee | February 19, 2020

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The Chesapeake Climate Action Network and our lobbying arm CCAN Action Fund have spent the past 15 years advocating get laws on the books to improve our environment, kick-start a clean energy future, and reduce our greenhouse gas pollution. We rely on these state laws, and on federal environmental laws, to help us fight for a cleaner environment.

Yet across Maryland, communities are still threatened by an unhealthy environment -- federal and state laws, as well as efforts at their enforcement and compliance, are coming up short. Despite the progress we have made, Maryland still suffers from polluted air, unhealthy water, and the increasing threats posed by climate change.

Air pollution causes millions of premature deaths every year worldwide, 1.5 million more than smoking. In 2013, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology determined that Maryland has the highest air pollution mortality rate of any state in the country. As climate change worsens and the state gets hotter, these air pollution issues could worsen.

The Chesapeake Climate Action Network is a grassroots group that works closely with Maryland residents facing pollution in their communities. Right now, I am working in a community that is overburdened by fossil fuel infrastructure. This community has five fossil fuel energy plants within 13 miles of each other and three of those are within a couple of miles of an elementary school.

Air permits for two of these power plants are up for renewal in the coming weeks. Yet residents are reluctant to engage on these air permits because they are frustrated with a regulatory process that approves what are essentially permits to continue to pollute their community. And they are disillusioned with a system that has allowed this concentration of fossil fuel plants to happen in the first place.

Just as we have constitutional rights to free speech, voting, a free press, and religion, our fundamental rights to a healthy and healthful environment should be recognized by our government. Indeed this right is recognized by over a hundred nations and a handful of states in the US.



CCAN Action Fund supports House Bill 517, the Maryland Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Health & Justice. The Amendment would clarify the responsibility of state government to protect Marylanders, while empowering Marylanders, local communities, and the state to enforce these rights. The Amendment's enhanced protections would create a new legal safeguard against the release of pollutants like methane and carbon dioxide that accelerate climate change and toxic pollutants that threaten drinking water.

The Amendment would also shore up gaps in existing laws, strengthen enforcement and compliance, and assure that everyone, no matter what zip code they live in, are equally protected from environmental degradation.

CCAN Action Fund urges the Committee to pass House Bill 517.

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