

Testimony before the House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 19, 2019

In **SUPPORT** of HB 517: Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights
(Del. Stewart)

Submitted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Baltimore, Maryland

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University

Dear Honorable Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement in support of HB 517, a Constitution Amendment on Environmental Rights.

We are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. Since 1996, CLF has applied a public health lens to the ecological, economic, and social considerations across the food system.

The proposed amendment to the Maryland Constitution would, subject to voter approval, establish that every person has the right to a certain clean and healthy environment; specifying that the State's natural resources are the common property of every person; requiring the State and each political subdivision of the State to serve as trustees of the State's natural resources and to preserve, conserve, protect, and maintain the State's natural resources for the benefit of every person, including present and future generations; prohibiting the State or a political subdivision of the State from causing unreasonable diminution of or degradation to the State's natural resources; prohibiting the State or a political subdivision of the State from infringing on certain rights; establishing that every person has the right to intervene in an action brought by the State or a political subdivision of the State to protect certain rights; authorizing the State, a political subdivision of the State, or any person to enforce certain rights.

CLF is particularly concerned about the public health and environmental problems associated with some types of agricultural production. We have studied the impacts of large poultry operations on the Eastern Shore and have supported local citizen groups in their efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of those operations on air quality, surface water quality, and groundwater quality by limiting the scale and intensity of those large operations. Too many times, communities have been negatively impacted and not enough consideration has been given to the position that the natural resources of the state, especially clean air and water, belong to all citizens of Maryland.

We support the passage of the proposed amendment so the voters of Maryland can have a voice.