



**Testimony in Support of HB 803 – Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying
Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act (Del. Solomon)
FAVORABLE**

February 25, 2021

Dear Chairman McIntosh and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in support of HB 803. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We believe that the goals of carbon neutrality and offsets established in HB 803 for public institutions of higher learning will achieve clear benefits to our state.

If this legislation is enacted, Maryland’s public universities and colleges will be in good company. In 2013 the UC system announced the Carbon Neutrality Initiative (CNI) and pledged to be carbon neutral by 2025 from scope 1 and 2 carbon emission sources. Just down the road, American University was the first urban campus, the first research university, and the largest higher education institution in the United States to achieve carbon neutrality, in 2018. A year ago, Colorado College announced it was the eighth college in the nation to achieve carbon neutrality, even while increasing its building footprint by more than 10%. Five New England colleges—Amherst, Hampshire, Smith and Williams in western Massachusetts, along with Bowdoin in Maine—have combined their buying power to launch a solar farm in Farmington, Maine, University Business reported in 2018.

It’s time to bring clarity, focus, and energy to Maryland’s higher institutions and require a focused, scalable plan for carbon neutrality.

Just last month, an international group of scientists released a paper stating the planet is facing a “ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction. The 17 experts say the planet is in a much worse state than most people – even scientists – understood.

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“The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts,” they write in a report in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* which references more than 150 studies detailing the world’s major environmental challenges.

Notably, the impacts of our slowly warming planet are inextricably intertwined with all our other challenges. Climate change impacts the likelihood of future pandemics, climate-induced mass migrations, and battles over resources. It affects Maryland’s agricultural economy, the ability of our biodiversity to thrive, and the health of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays. As Maryland already faces severe air quality issues, climate change further compromises the health of our residents.

This bill takes critical climate action measures that meet the urgency of this moment in time, and does so at the very public institutions that should be forward-thinking as they nurture the leaders of tomorrow.

As a country, we are in the midst of a new racial reckoning, and we must not ignore the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by communities of color and low-income communities. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, communities of color and low-income communities in the United States are often disproportionately burdened by environmental and public health hazards, and enjoy fewer benefits from environmental programs and natural resources.

According to a 2015 report from the Environmental Law Clinic of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, socioeconomically disadvantaged and African American communities in Maryland bear a disproportionate burden of cancer risk from air toxics exposure and are also more likely to live in close proximity to toxic releasing facilities like incinerators. The American Lung Association 2020 “Road to Clean Air” report gives Maryland abysmal grades for smog or ozone pollution, including F’s for both Baltimore and Prince George’s County. Across Baltimore, the hottest areas tend to be the poorest and that pattern is not unusual. In dozens of major U.S. cities, low-income neighborhoods are more likely to be hotter than their wealthier counterparts.

At the same time, by all accounts, Maryland is severely lacking when it comes to having policies on the books that advocate for Environmental Justice. The most important note from the aforementioned 2015 report: is that most of the formal recommendations made to the General Assembly languished over the period of 1999-2015. The Law Clinic states:

“Maryland should adopt a more systematic and transparent approach to addressing environmental justice issues, including requiring each state agency to develop an environmental justice strategy and regularly report on its progress. The state should also create an Office of Environmental Justice to coordinate and support environmental justice efforts, expand community representation on the Commission on Environmental Justice, and develop new policies to address and prevent environmental injustice.”

We appreciate the environmental justice focus of this legislation.

Maryland must do more for climate action — in the name of environmental justice, for the health of our communities, and for the future of our families. This committee can make a commitment to that work by issuing a favorable report on HB 803.

John B. King Jr.

Alice Wilkerson

Founder and Board Chair

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