

Testimony before the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 29, 2021
In SUPPORT of H.B 317: Food Procurement – GHG Emissions
Presented by Miranda Mlilo

Thank you, Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Miranda Mlilo, and I am testifying as a 2019 graduate of University of Maryland and a food justice and climate activist.

I spent my time at the University of Maryland, organizing around environmental and climate justice. When I came to UMD as a Freshman 6 years ago, I was so excited to start my classes, meet new people, and take that first step towards independence. However, just like so many other people my age, the looming threat of climate change made me uncertain about what my future would look like.

One of the personal choices I knew I could make is through what I ate every day. The agriculture sector counts for around a quarter of climate emissions, and I knew that by eating climate-friendly foods, I could do my part to reduce my carbon footprint. I am grateful that UMD dining services were able to support that choice. Every day, I frequented the plant-based food station, along with most of my friends who wanted to make the climate conscious choice- but who also chose to eat there just because the food tasted better and made us feel better too. This year UMD dining services took it a step further and implemented the “Cool Food Pledge” an initiative that commits the university to tracking its food related GHG emissions and reducing them by 25% as this bill asks the state to do. And so far, according to their director of sustainability, they have received no criticism or pushback from students whatsoever, except for one letter in the student paper arguing they should have set a larger reduction target! And this is because, in doing this, UMD showed they care about the health of their students, and the planet.

I would like to see my state do the same thing. I have lived here for all my life, and I want to know that my state government is making choices that prioritize my health and safety, both as someone who lives in a state whose coasts are threatened by rising sea levels, soil degradation, toxic water, and polluted air- but also a person of color that recognizes that environmental justice is a human rights issue. Communities of color are on the front lines of environmental degradation and are hit first and worst by these issues.

Maryland has an opportunity to be on the forefront of environmental progress and to hold public institutions accountable for the health and wellbeing of the people they serve.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify, and I would like to encourage you to give this bill a favorable report.