

Good afternoon Chairman Pinsky and senators of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee. My name is Melody Arrington and today I will stress the importance of the FUTURE Act and its potential to positively impact marginalized communities. Social justice has been a passion of mine since I was a child. However, when examining how to dismantle systemic inequality, too often is environmental justice left out of the discussion.

I am a junior at Bowie State University majoring in Government with a concentration in political science. I serve as the Political Action and Community Outreach Chair of the Student Government Association. Additionally, I am the Vice President of the Bowie State Youth and College Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Bowie State has reduced our carbon footprint by 15% since 2007 and has a goal of total carbon neutrality by 2021. I'm proud of the progress my HBCU has made as a leader in environmental stewardship in the state of Maryland. Bowie State, while making great strides in their sustainability goals, is only one out of twelve institutions in the University System of Maryland. Other schools, especially the larger University System of Maryland schools, can look at Bowie State as a model for sustainability goals. The climate crisis will disproportionately affect minority and low-income communities. Our universities like University of Maryland College Park and University of Baltimore are located in minority communities that will be positively impacted by this legislation. We need to protect our communities and our environment. It is imperative that this issue is taken seriously by our political representatives. University System of Maryland institutions create leaders, it is only right that they are leaders too.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities in our state. According to the Maryland Coronavirus Data Dashboard, Prince George's County, a predominantly Black county, leads the state in Covid-19 cases at 72,250 as of February 22, 2021. Black and brown people

have increased risk of contracting Covid-19 due to what the Center for Disease Control outlines as social determinants of health which includes the physical environment and socioeconomic status. People of color are more likely to be essential workers, facing increased risk of exposure just to eat. The City of Baltimore and Baltimore county has a combined total of 90,031 coronavirus cases. Additionally, Baltimore city leads the state in asthma mortality and pediatric asthma hospitalizations. Air pollution and heat islands are few of many effects of climate change in our state and that can lead to public health problems including asthma that have exacerbated the pandemic. Often low-income communities are most impacted by environmental racism and Baltimore is no different. Pre-existing conditions like asthma and other respiratory illnesses increase the likelihood that an individual will contract Covid-19 and succumb to it. It is too late to reverse the effects environmental racism had on the Covid-19 pandemic. As the climate crisis escalates and we exhaust finite resources, inevitable phenomena like global pandemics and natural disasters will devastate marginalized communities first. We are at the turning point, action must be taken to protect these communities before irreparable damage is done.

I implore you all, as respected leaders in our state, make the ethical and necessary decision to dismantle systemic inequality and leave our planet better than you found it.

A key component of our bill is our commitment to environmental justice. As our legislators, you have the opportunity to positively affect communities that are heavily impacted by environmental racism. The component of our bill called the Environmental Justice Offset Project is just one of many ways our bill will tangibly transform marginalized communities affected by environmental racism.

I am proud to be a member of the MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition. Our diverse coalition has grown from five students to hundreds. We represent a multitude of races,

cultures, and institutions, united because of our common goal. Our diversity is one of our biggest strengths because it demonstrates how the climate crisis will impact us all. Nearly every institution in the University System of Maryland is represented in our coalition. Additionally, we have representatives from Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland. The future of your constituents is dependent upon your decision. I am sure you all have children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, whether immediate or extended. Imagine telling them they don't have a right to a liveable planet. How can you defend not fighting for their future? I, respectfully, urge you to make the morally just and paramount decision in favor of Senate Bill 0835, the FUTURE Act.