

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 24, 2021

Testimony in Favor of SB674

Environment - Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities - Reform

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 674, legislation that will make necessary reforms to the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities and ensure that the Commission's critical mission is met.

The Senate President's Workgroup on Equity and Inclusion, led by Senate President Pro Temp Griffith, spent the interim exploring, among other topics, policy tools this General Assembly can employ to ensure that environmental justice is at the forefront of our State's policy decisions. A key consideration in how to accomplish this was to reform the current Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities.

I can say it no better than the Workgroup's report: "There is no question that our State's low-income communities and communities of color bear the brunt of environmental hazards in our State. Often, these communities are home to a disproportionate number of polluting facilities, placing residents at higher risk for health problems linked to environmental exposures. Further, these communities often lack sufficient resources and capacity to meaningfully participate in environmental decision-making processes - and in the long-term they are more vulnerable to emerging threats such as coastal flooding."

This legislation will specifically reform the Commission by:

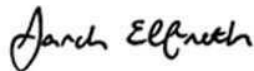
1. Expanding the membership to include at least three members of communities directly impacted by environmental justice issues;
2. Ensuring that the membership of the Commission is reflective of the racial, gender, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the State;
3. Providing new members with an orientation that reviews environmental justice issues in the State and the previous work of the Commission;
4. Allowing the Commission to elect a chair amongst its members -- rather than having the Governor select the chair;

5. Requiring the Commission to meet at least 6 times a year -- and that these meetings have to be in a rural and urban part of the State;
6. Authorizing the Commission to use data sets and mapping tools to review the current impact of policies on environmental justice issues;
7. Authorizing the Commission to create a list of supplemental environmental projects to address environmental justice issues.

Lastly, I am currently working with the Dr. Sacoby Wilson and the League of Conservation Voters on amendments to ensure that this reform incorporates some of the various ideas we have heard from the advocates since the introduction of this legislation. That amendment will be finalized shortly and will be distributed and explained to the Committee members.

When reformed by SB 674, Maryland's Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities has the potential to help put Maryland truly address and unwind the environmental injustices built over centuries. I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Elfreth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Elfreth