



Maryland General Assembly
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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Testimony of Alexandra Wyatt
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SB 414, Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021
Sponsor: Senator Pinsky
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 414, the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021. My name is Alexandra Wyatt and I am Policy Director and Legal Counsel for GRID Alternatives, the nation's largest nonprofit solar installer. Our affiliate GRID Alternatives Mid-Atlantic (GRID Mid-Atlantic) operates in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, providing solar job training and no-cost solar installations to underserved and low-income customers. GRID Mid-Atlantic offers these comments in support of SB 414 and requests a **favorable** report in committee. We also offer for the Sponsor's and Committee's consideration some suggestions to further improve the equity and effectiveness of the bill.

GRID Mid-Atlantic's mission is to build community-powered solutions to advance economic, environmental, and climate justice through renewable energy. We envision a rapid, equitable transition to a world powered by renewable energy that benefits everyone. To achieve that transition, GRID Mid-Atlantic works exclusively with low-income and underserved communities to bring them the many benefits of solar and other clean energy technologies. These benefits include access to hands-on job training opportunities in fulfilling renewable energy careers, as well as lower energy burdens, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and a cleaner, healthier environment.

GRID Mid-Atlantic strongly supports the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021 and its more rapid greenhouse gas reduction goal. We particularly support the bill's requirements that the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities develop recommendations for identifying communities disproportionately affected by climate change; develop recommendations to address environmental justice concerns, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and co-pollutants, and build climate equity and resilience within those communities; and set goals for the percentage of state climate funding that should be used for the benefit of these communities. GRID suggests that these recommendations and goals could be improved by clarifying that communities can be defined not only geographically but by circumstances, such as low income, that can affect families across Maryland.

We note that New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) separately defines "disadvantaged communities" as communities that bear various environmental burdens and possess certain socioeconomic criteria, or that comprise high-concentrations of low- and moderate- income



households. We believe that “or” is important so that fewer or no low-income households are left out. At the same time, community identification and prioritization of funds should also aim to ensure that it is actually the low-income households, or households, businesses, and organizations meeting other socioeconomic criteria, that receive the direct benefits—not higher-income households or businesses that are located in the same geographic areas. Greater clarity in the bill language could help guide the community identification recommendations toward these principles.

To further strengthen these provisions, goals for the percentage of state climate funding that should benefit these communities should be developed in conjunction with mechanisms for accountability to communities, to ensure that the goals are in fact met. Finally, this provision could be bolstered by interim provisions requiring agencies to use best efforts to prioritize state climate funding for low-income and disadvantaged communities immediately and while the Commission’s work is in progress.

GRID Mid-Atlantic also strongly supports the creation of a Just Transition Employment and Retraining Working Group. However, the prescriptive requirements on who shall be included omit organizations, like Power52 and GRID Mid-Atlantic, that bring clean energy industry training opportunities to some of the communities and individuals who have the greatest need for such opportunities and who are the most underrepresented in the clean energy workforce. These programs can provide access points to apprenticeships and unionized jobs that otherwise would not have as much reach into these communities. As an illustration, just across the Maryland border, GRID Mid-Atlantic is responsible for implementing the Solar Works DC low-income solar installation and job training program spearheaded by the Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE) and the Department of Employment Services (DOES).¹ By meeting trainees where they are and providing wraparound services, the program has helped trainees in a wide range of circumstances, including homelessness and post-incarceration reentry, start green career paths.²

GRID Mid-Atlantic opposes reallocation of clean energy program funds, including the Strategic Energy Investment Fund, toward soil or other non-energy-related programs. The Strategic *Energy* Investment Fund comes from and should promote energy initiatives. The Healthy Soils Program is not solely intended for carbon sequestration, as the first listed goal in its authorizing legislation is to “Improve the health, yield, and profitability of the soils of the State.” Thus, we respectfully urge the removal of this provision from the Climate Solutions Now Act, and maintenance of separate funding sources for the Healthy Soils Program.

GRID Mid-Atlantic is very pleased to see Maryland’s leaders prioritizing equity and environmental justice as the state looks to increase the ambition of its climate commitments to meet the needs of our moment. We thank you for your consideration of SB 414, and we hope that you will advance it.

¹ For more information on Solar Works DC, see <https://doee.dc.gov/service/solar-works-dc>, <https://gridalternatives.org/regions/midatlantic/solar-works-dc>.

² See, e.g., <https://www.streetsensemedia.org/article/solar-works-d-c-employment-green-energy/#.YA9g0-hKiUk>.