



## **Testimony in Support of HB82 – Constitutional Amendment Environmental Rights**

January 20, 2021

Dear Chairman Barve and members the Environmental and Transportation Committee:

The Maryland Pesticide Education Network (MPEN) and the Smart on Pesticides Coalition (SOPC) it spearheads, comprised of 107 organizations and businesses, support passage of HB82. MPEN and SOPC work to address the critical, and all too often long-term, adverse impacts of toxic pesticides and promote safer alternative practices and products.

The Maryland General Assembly passed the Maryland Environmental Policy Act in 1973 which recognized that “each person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment.” This critically needed lens when it comes to protecting life in our state from toxic pesticides and a myriad of other environmental adverse impacts --despite being codified in law -- has been ignored. This has resulted in often serious adverse environmental impacts on the health of people in our state, pollinators and aquatic life exposed to toxics such as pesticides linked to cancer and respiratory, developmental and neurological long-term impacts.

HB82, an urgently needed amendment, will ensure that this right to a healthful environment would be enforceable. Public and environmental health must be sustainable top priorities in our state despite administrative and political changes in leadership.

Environmental pollution and degradation are often concentrated in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods across Maryland. Pesticide exposures and the risk from exposure adverse impacts are highest in these communities.

A case in point is that food and farm workers have nor been provided basic protections during this current pandemic. These essential workers have been ignored when it comes to ensuring they are provided masks, are socially distanced and in transportation to and from inadequate employer-provided housing, leaving them more vulnerable to the coronavirus. All too often, farm workers have often not been provided federally required PPE when applying pesticides that exacerbate respiratory symptoms and can weaken their immune systems making them more vulnerable to the coronavirus.

With the passage of HB82, we will protect the right for all to a healthful environment in our state constitution. Requiring the state to protect Maryland’s natural resources and our right to live in a healthful environment will provide greater assurance that Maryland government will make the health of the public one of our highest priorities.

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