

Committee: Finance
Testimony on: SB148 “Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 2, 2021

We the undersigned organizations respectfully request a favorable report on SB148, the Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021.

As Maryland confronts the climate crisis, it is abundantly clear that the state must undertake a managed transition off of coal-fired power generation. The past 12 months have seen a remarkable shift in the coal industry in Maryland, underscoring the urgent need to pass legislation to manage the transition off coal. Five of the six coal-fired power plants in Maryland have either retired or announced their plans to retire in the coming years. With this transition clearly happening and workers already experiencing layoffs, the General Assembly must act this year to support impacted workers and the communities which historically have been overburdened by coal pollution.

Coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel on the electric grid, produces significant levels of harmful and toxic pollution, including smog-forming nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium, and more. Coal has polluted Maryland’s air and waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay, for generations, and this pollution often has disproportionately impacted communities of color. In fact, the six Maryland coal plants graded in the NAACP’s 2016 *Coal Blooded* report received dismal environmental justice scores of F, D-, D, D, D+, and C.[1]

Maryland’s coal-fired power plants also are significant contributors to the climate crisis. The state will not meet the standards of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act nor international climate targets without ceasing burning coal at power plants. Analysis of international climate targets makes it clear that the U.S. and other higher-income countries must stop burning coal within a decade.[2] Further, Maryland’s own laws explicitly describe the state’s goal to “eliminate carbon-fueled generation from the state’s electric grid.”[3]

SB148 is a critical step in this process because it codifies dates by which Maryland power plants will stop burning coal, funds new worker and community transition programs, and creates a longer-term fossil fuel transition planning process that will engage even more impacted stakeholders.

In November 2020, the Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) – a Commission comprised of state agencies, scientists, environmental organizations, clean energy and fossil fuel representatives, and representatives of organized labor unions -- called on the General Assembly to pass legislation that manages the state’s transition off coal:

The General Assembly should establish a clear, enforceable schedule to responsibly manage Maryland’s transition off its remaining coal-fired power plants by no later than 2030 and replace the capacity with equivalent non-coal-fired power, including the creation of a workforce and community transition plan to support laid-off workers and impacted communities.[4]

The Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021 will respond to the MCCC’s recommendation and enable the state to responsibly transition off coal in response to the climate crisis. Please provide a favorable report on SB148.

Sincerely,

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[1] <https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CoalBlooded.pdf>

[2] https://climateanalytics.org/media/report_coal_phase_out_2019.pdf

[3] Maryland Public Utilities Article §7-702(a)(2)

[4]

<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MCCCAnnualReport2020.pdf>