

February 23, 2022

**Committee:**

**Testimony on:** HB729 – Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act

**Position:** Favorable

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and all members of the Appropriations Committee

As a student at the University of Maryland, College Park, and resident of Silver Spring, I am strongly in favor of the FUTURE Act. The University System of Maryland (USM) is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the state government, while simultaneously representing youth who aim to build better futures for themselves and scientists who are on the front lines of climate science research. As a student who aims to create a liveable future, I strongly support FUTURE Act's solutions which help universities to take strong actions to curb their own climate impact, as well as advance climate education and environmental and economic justice.

I grew up in Silver Spring, which means I experienced the natural gas explosion at the Flower Branch apartments in 2016. As a 15-year old, hearing about children and adults being injured, and even dying in this explosion and fire shocked me. I didn't think gas explosions like this would happen in Maryland, especially not in Silver Spring. At the time, I couldn't fathom how this had happened. Residents reported smelling natural gas for weeks before the explosion. Despite reporting the issue, the problem wasn't addressed, and people paid with their lives. This event was a focal point in my understanding of how human and environmental welfare are always intertwined. Environmental health is human health. As a student, I learn this every day.

As a student, I care about the the FUTURE act because it specifically includes a mandated carbon neutrality for Maryland public four-year universities by 2035, the Environmental and Economic Justice scholarship fund, creating or strengthening Offices of Sustainability, and lastly, laying the foundation for a Sustainability General Education Requirement. By adding carbon to the atmosphere, universities contribute to climate change and add pollutants to their communities. These harms fall disproportionately on low-income and minority communities, hence the need for the environmental and economic justice scholarship fund to help pay the social cost of carbon. I also support that Universities must establish an Office of Sustainability to help further their understanding of climate science. This will foster best practices and resources in the larger campus community as well as just the University. Lastly, the FUTURE Act lays the necessary foundation for a Sustainability General Education Requirement through a feasibility study. Working towards ensuring all students have a general understanding of sustainability and climate science is a huge step towards creating interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability, and ingraining it in everyday studies. The FUTURE Act is a necessary piece of legislation in order to create a planet that is safe and livable for years to come.

Sincerely,

*Caroline Thorne, University of Maryland — College Park, cthorne@terpmail.umd.edu*