



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

**Position: Favorable**

**Submitted by: Akshaya Balaji, MaryPIRG Students President**

Dear Chairwoman McIntosh and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Akshaya Balaji and I am the president of MaryPIRG Students. I am writing on behalf of our student board of directors and our student members **in support of the FUTURE Act HB729.**

**Climate change will not wait for us to act.** With 3,100 miles of shoreline, Maryland is the fourth-most vulnerable state to the effects of sea-level rise which is caused by climate change. Rural communities will be devastated as increased extreme weather events and changes in climate patterns disrupt planting and harvesting cycles and cause crop and livestock loss. Climate change and air pollutants from fossil fuels make low-income and minority communities more vulnerable to asthma and other pre-existing conditions that exacerbate the effects of diseases like COVID-19. No one in our state will be untouched. We must act swiftly and decisively to protect and restore our climate, so that those that will inherit it can enjoy climate stability.

Institutions of higher education have played a huge role in Maryland and around the world as beacons of research and societal progress. Public universities have a responsibility to protect, educate, and create well-rounded and well-informed future leaders of the state. These public institutions have massive carbon footprints due to their high-tech research facilities, energy needs, and transportation needs. **The University System of Maryland is the largest emitter of carbon in the entire state government.**

Youth are utilizing their agency to remind public research institutions of their guiding principles. This legislation will ensure that universities will lead the way in carbon neutrality, address climate change while addressing climate justice, and empower students and institutions.

**This bill makes Maryland Public Universities leaders in carbon reductions and climate justice by:**

- Requiring carbon neutrality by 2035 (scopes 1 and 2 by 2025)
- Establishing an Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund for in-state students displaced by climate change or from environmental justice communities
- Facilitating the sharing of best practices and resources through establishing offices of sustainability at each institution
- Conducting a feasibility and implementation study for a sustainability education requirement for each institution

As student leaders, we are in the unique position to give voice to our community and stand for a vision of a cleaner, greener, more meaningful future for us all. We are proud to be part of a movement of young people that spans across the globe in support of taking action to protect our climate and the world we will inherit. The time to act on climate change is now and we urge you to stand with us and with future generations to come.

Respectfully,

MaryPIRG Students, Student Board of Directors:

Akshaya Balaji, President

Glin Brower, Treasurer

Jackie Reyes, Vice President of Public Relations

Greeshma Anand, Vice President of Financial Affairs