

Jeffries Favorable Testimony FUTURE Act HB0729

I'm Nina Jeffries, a senior at the University of Maryland, College Park and the Coalition-Building and Endorsements Coordinator for the MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition (or MSCAC). I am so proud to be before you today to share with you the bill that we wrote.

As members of this committee are all well-aware, we must act swiftly and collectively to combat climate change.

Our public universities hold a unique and valuable position in our efforts to protect the state from climate change. Our universities play the critical role of an educator by creating well-rounded and well-informed future leaders of the state. Our universities are also problem solvers. They support research into climate solutions — we have experts in climate science, energy consumption, waste systems, and environmental injustices—all areas that we need to understand to have a just transition. By virtue of being powerful institutions, our universities also leave large footprints. The University System of Maryland is the largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the entire state government. In 2021 USM emitted nearly 350,000 tons of carbon dioxide. That's more than all of the other state agencies combined.¹ Universities are not some small chunk of state government emissions — they make up the majority.

Most universities in the system either have no commitment to carbon neutrality or a soft voluntary 2050 deadline. This is unacceptable. The science shows that we have to move faster.

The FUTURE Act addresses the university system's daunting emissions while supporting their role as an educator and problem-solver in the bill's four key components:

[The bill's overarching key policy is mandating carbon neutrality for Maryland public four-year universities by 2035](#)

Maryland public universities must achieve complete carbon neutrality by 2035, with an interim goal of carbon neutrality for direct emissions and purchased electricity by 2025.

- **Direct emissions** (Scope 1) includes emissions produced on campus (boilers, central heating plants, university owned vehicles, etc.)
- **Purchased electricity** (Scope 2) includes emissions from purchased electricity

These scopes must be carbon neutral by 2025 because they are directly under the control of the university, and we must cut emissions where we can as soon as possible.

¹ <https://dgs.maryland.gov/pages/energy/database/index.aspx>

- **Induced emissions** (Scope 3) includes emissions burned on behalf of the university (air travel for faculty and staff, commuting, etc.) and must be carbon neutral by 2035

We give an additional ten years for this because we recognize that these types of emissions are hard to calculate and address. For our universities without strong sustainability offices that have not been tracking emissions from business and student travel, employee commuting, waste, and purchased goods, expecting them to figure out how to reliably track and reduce these emissions by 2025 will be difficult. As such, we give institutions another ten years to neutralize these emissions. Further areas of the bill will support sharing methodology and resources to help these schools that are not yet tracking these figures.

The bill is not prescriptive. It lays out fleet and building electrification, purchasing renewable energy, and other proactive means of reducing emissions as preferred. Universities can purchase carbon offsets to help them reach neutrality, as we know these changes to infrastructure and systems will take time. Lastly, universities will not be permitted to purchase carbon offsets to achieve neutrality for scopes 1 and 2 after 2055 - meaning those scopes must be actually carbon zero at that time.

[My favorite part of the bill and new addition this year is the creation of the Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund](#)

By adding carbon to the atmosphere, we know universities are contributing to climate change and adding co-pollutants to their communities. These harms are falling disproportionately on low-income and minority communities. The greatest good that universities do is providing access to high-quality education.

The Economic and Environmental Justice Scholarship Fund will reduce the cost of higher education for students from Maryland communities displaced by effects of climate change and/or suffering from disproportionate pollution burden and health disparities.

When universities purchase carbon offsets, the cost of each carbon offset will be subtracted from the social cost of carbon and the difference will go to the Fund. The structure of the Fund forces the universities to pay the entire social cost of carbon to realize the full damages from climate change.

[The third key component of the bill is the creation and strengthening of Offices of Sustainability](#)

To ensure the bill's requirements are met, universities must establish an Office of Sustainability by 2023, and the office must consist of at least one staff member. Existing sustainability staff at our universities create greater understanding of climate science, energy consumption, waste

systems, and environmental injustices so our public universities can continue to produce well-rounded and well-informed students.

By requiring that offices meet regularly and share best practices and resources, the bill additionally attempts to reduce resource inequities that exist among institutions. We hope the increased communication between offices will foster new cross-university relationships, programs, and create a coalition of sustainability in Maryland higher education.

Additionally, the policies in the FUTURE Act dovetail closely with the decisions this committee has made on the Climate Solutions Now Act and other pieces of climate legislation this session. Not only will our state be a leader, but so will our universities.

Over 70 organizations have signed on to the bill. Many of these are student organizations. Climate change is hijacking my future, your future, and the futures of those that will come after us. There is no place for inaction, and there is no place for excuses. I urge you all to support the FUTURE Act, and remind you