



**Testimony in Support of HB 729 – Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying
Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act
FAVORABLE**

March 1, 2022

Dear Chairwoman McIntosh and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in support of HB 729. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We believe that the goals of carbon neutrality and offsets established in HB 729 for public institutions of higher learning will achieve clear benefits to our state.

Climate change will not wait for us to act, and we are already seeing the impacts of our inaction. 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, greatly affecting our farmers and rural communities. Fossil fuels and air pollution discriminately affect low-income and minority communities too, especially in Baltimore City and Prince George's County.

Public research universities are measures of societal progress and bold, actionable change; they have a responsibility to not only the communities around them, but the state that sponsors them. However, the University System of Maryland is the largest emitter of carbon in the entire state government. Compelling our state's public universities to responsibly reduce carbon emissions and prioritize climate justice is the first step in making Maryland a national leader on combating climate change.

If this legislation is enacted, Maryland's public universities and colleges will be in good company. In 2013 the UC system announced the Carbon Neutrality Initiative (CNI) and pledged to be carbon neutral by 2025 from scope 1 and 2 carbon emission sources. Just down the road, American University was the first urban campus, the first research university, and the largest higher education institution in the United States to achieve carbon neutrality, in 2018. Two years ago, Colorado College announced it was the eighth college in the nation to achieve carbon neutrality, even while increasing its building footprint by more than 10%. Five New England

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colleges—Amherst, Hampshire, Smith and Williams in western Massachusetts, along with Bowdoin in Maine—have combined their buying power to launch a solar farm in Farmington, Maine, University Business reported in 2018.

It's time to bring clarity, focus, and energy to Maryland's higher institutions and require a focused, scalable plan for carbon neutrality.

Just last year, an international group of scientists released a paper stating the planet is facing a “ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction. The 17 experts say the planet is in a much worse state than most people – even scientists – understood.

“The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its life forms – including humanity – is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts,” they write in a report in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* which references more than 150 studies detailing the world's major environmental challenges.

Notably, the impacts of our slowly warming planet are inextricably intertwined with all our other challenges. Climate change impacts the likelihood of future pandemics, climate-induced mass migrations, and battles over resources. It affects Maryland's agricultural economy, the ability of our biodiversity to thrive, and the health of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays. As Maryland already faces severe air quality issues, climate change further compromises the health of our residents.

This bill takes critical climate action measures that meet the urgency of this moment in time, and does so at the very public institutions that should be forward-thinking as they nurture the leaders of tomorrow.

Maryland must do more for climate action — in the name of environmental justice, for the health of our communities, and for the future of our families. This committee can make a commitment to that work by issuing a favorable report on HB 729.