



17 for Peace and Justice

HB 729

Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying Reductions in Emissions

(THE FUTURE ACT)

SUPPORT

Honorable Chair McIntosh and esteemed Delegates of the Appropriations Committee, we the students of 17 for Peace and Justice, ask for your **favorable report of HB 729. HB 729, also known as the Future Act**, would transition the University System of Maryland and other Maryland colleges towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

17 for Peace and Justice is a student environmental justice organization based at the University of Maryland, College Park. Our goal is to empower students and build community capacity to address social, economic, and political injustice and related environmental and health inequalities by using the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice established at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC. We exist to leverage the privilege and resources of our UMD student-body membership for the good of communities that are fighting environmental injustices.

As students at the University of Maryland, College Park we have a direct stake in local environmental justice issues. In fact, the University of Maryland is the single largest emitter in the entire state government and our campus exists within Prince George's County.¹ Out of Maryland's 24 counties, Prince George's County has the 3rd highest number of power plants per square mile.² Prince George's County also has the highest Black population and second highest Latinx population of any county in the state of Maryland.³ The number of power plants in Prince George's County is a reflection of larger systemic environmental injustices seen across the country, with environmental hazards and burdens disproportionately located in minority communities. Thus, it's critical to ensure our state's environmental policies and programs account for these inequities. The Future Act achieves this by tackling a major source of the state's greenhouse gas emissions from Maryland colleges, while simultaneously incorporating racial and socioeconomic justice through the establishment of the Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund. The Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund would

¹ <https://dgs.maryland.gov/Pages/OFP/index.aspx>

² <https://www.countyoffice.org/md-prince-georges-county-power-plant/>

³ <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/maryland/black-population-percentage#map>



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help to alleviate the cost of higher education for students coming from Maryland communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts, pollution, and other environmental health disparities. These communities, such as Prince George's and Baltimore County, already have the lowest enrollment rates as a fraction of their population at the University of Maryland, College Park compared to other Maryland counties.⁴ Establishing HB 729's Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund would help to fill this gap and provide greater educational opportunities for students from disenfranchised communities.

At the University System of Maryland, students are equipped with the knowledge to tackle the world's biggest challenges. It is here, where we are empowered to initiate and advocate for change. Yet, the irony is that these very institutions are contributing to the most pressing challenge of our time, climate change. The campuses making up the University System of Maryland release significant amounts of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and induce local environmental issues. While some campuses have accelerated their climate reduction goals, there is no unified target or requirement, leading to incongruities in climate action among campuses. HB 729 would unify climate goals among the University System of Maryland, plus Morgan State University and St. Mary's College, by establishing a carbon neutrality target of 2035. The climate crisis is only intensifying and we need to act now. As our representatives, we hope our words will resonate with you as you review HB 729. For our futures and yours, we hope you will vote favorably for the Future Act.

Sincerely,

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⁴ <https://ggwash.org/view/68464/prince-georges-sends-fewer-students-to-umcp-than-other-maryland-counties-why>



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