

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB0729– Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying
Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act**

Hello Chairwoman McIntosh and members of the committee, my name is Kajal Patel, and I am proud to be representing the FUTURE Act here today. Currently, I am a junior studying Cell Biology and Genetics at the University of Maryland, College Park. Born and raised in a bilingual household in Annapolis, my parents and grandparents have instilled in me the strength to speak out for myself, especially when I feel I am not being heard. My dedication to a sustainable future for my peers and I has led me to this leadership position in MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition (MSCAC) as visibility coordinator, as we lead universities across the state to carbon neutrality. As an entirely student-led coalition, this legislation is a priority for the generation that has yet to begin their life.

When I envisioned my freshman year at UMD, I never imagined joining a group of determined climate activists at all. While diving deep into my studies, having fun, and soaking in college life, I learned about the effect of fossil fuel pollutants on economically disadvantaged communities around me, and how my university was a major contributor. I simply could not be on the sidelines while this was happening, and I needed to speak up.

With a campaign that started at UMD, to push leadership to commit to more renewable sources of energy, I was committed to make real change. When we hit a roadblock at our own campus, my peers and I took this movement statewide. Then, we realized the multitude of students that felt the same way as us—trapped—in a bind where universities are aware of their carbon footprint but unwilling to commit to a carbon neutrality agreement. As MSCAC, we have learned from climate organizations, youth movements, professors, and established climate activists to build the FUTURE Act. And, with the support of over 64 organizations, we've shaped this bill into something we're thrilled to have created.

Right in our home state, people are constantly under threat of flash flood warnings and are mostly people already economically disadvantaged and unable to repair future damages themselves. The FUTURE Act has incorporated this issue of climate change disproportionately affecting minority populations by introducing the Environmental Justice scholarship and a swift timeline to meet carbon neutrality commitments. This scholarship is a stepping stone to increasing access to education for those who are at increased risk of the health effects from pollutants in their community. Not only is this portion of our bill an innovative aspect of environmental justice, but an opportunity for our universities to take accountability of carbon emissions.

Our timeline to achieve carbon neutral universities is crucial to prevent temperatures rising 1.5°C, or even 2°C, from today, before irreparable damage.

As visibility coordinator, our social media has shared why this bill is a priority for students, and ways that MSCAC has taken to make this dream a reality. Being a student-led movement is the core of the FUTURE Act, since we incorporate the strong beliefs and standards that this current generation expects for years to come. Thank you for your time here today, listening to the voice of my peers, speaking up for a sustainable future.