

March 8, 2022

Chairman William C. Smith, Jr. and Members of the Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senate Bill 783 – Environmental Human Rights Amendment

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members:

The undersigned groups representing diverse communities of faith in Maryland testify our support of Senate Bill 783 to amend our constitution with an Environmental Human Rights Amendment.

All people have a fundamental right to clean air, clean water, unpolluted soil, and a stable climate. Period. A healthy environment is essential for all life and thus should be on equal footing with all other rights. At the time Maryland's Constitution was written, its drafters could not fathom that the clean water or clean air would be threatened in the ways it is today. **It is our responsibility to ensure the Maryland Constitutions protects the rights of Marylanders today.**

Sacrifice zones are immoral and an abuse of power, and are where oppressed communities disproportionately bear the burden of unwanted waste and pollution. It becomes a moral issue when our state chooses to put the interests of industry over the health of its citizens, especially of marginalized communities. This amendment would establish basic rights for all people to sound the alarm and stop this abuse in their neighborhoods.

In the Kresson neighborhood in Baltimore, there are dangerous remnants from decommissioned transformers¹ amid a host of industrial sites situated right in the middle of a residential neighborhood. This community is 61% Hispanic², with 22% of children living below the poverty line³, and 47% of residents having less than a high school degree⁴. There are examples of this sort of environmental injustice throughout Maryland, from abandoned brownfields in Baltimore, to polluting power plants in Prince George's County, to polluted well water in Salisbury. **Environmental laws often fail vulnerable communities. An enshrined right to a healthy environment would empower communities to fight for the Maryland we all know is possible.**

Opponents of this bill will argue that regulations already protect the environment, or if they are flawed, there are processes in place to strengthen existing laws. However, new harmful chemicals emerge all the time (a prime example being forever chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly referred to as "PFAS"), but it can take years for regulations to be enacted and the damage is already done. Well-designed regulations go unenforced, leaving the burden to citizens to fight on their own. Companies go bankrupt, leaving a trail of destruction in their path that taxpayers must deal with. **This bill would level the playing field for citizens to pursue their rights, even when Maryland's laws fail them.**

¹ Glenn Ross, neighborhood advocate and organizer of "Toxic Tours" in Baltimore,

<https://baltimorefishbowl.com/stories/take-a-toxic-tour-of-baltimores-scariest-environmental-problems/>

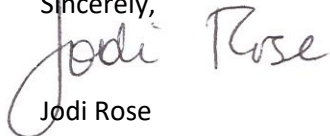
² 2020 Census Preliminary Demographics Data Explorer by Neighborhood Statistical Area, Baltimore City Department of Planning Policy & Data Analysis Division

³ Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance

⁴ Baltimore City Planning Department's Neighborhood Profile using American Community Statistical data:
<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/KRESSON.PDF>

We ask you to move forward on SB 783 so that all Marylanders have a right to a healthy and clean environment with clean air and water. Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake and our partners stand ready to work with you on all matters of Environmental Justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jodi Rose".

Jodi Rose

Executive Director

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

7 Willow Street, 2nd Floor

Annapolis, MD 21401

Additional Signers:

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Bob Simon, Co-Chair

Counties surrounding Washington DC

**Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United
Methodist Church**

Mike Koob, Chair, Creation Care Action & Advocacy
Team

**Multifaith Alliance of Climate Stewards of
Frederick County (MACS)**

Bernadette Roche, Co-Chair

Interfaith Power & Light - DMV

Joelle Novey, Executive Director

Statewide Organization

Green Muslims

Sevim Kalyoncu, Executive Director

Statewide Organization

St. Margaret's Episcopal Church

Annapolis, MD

Rev. Peter Mayer, Rector

Rev. Patti Sachs, Associate Rector

Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church

Bethesda, MD

Lee McNair, Co-Chair, Environmental Justice
Ministry

Oseh Shalom Congregation

Laurel, MD

Dr. Andrew Lincoln, Co-President

All Saints Lutheran Church

Bowie, MD

Rev. Angela Shannon, Pastor

Emily Demarco, Just Grace Social Justice Team

Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation

Bethesda, MD

Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb

Towson Unitarian Universalist Church

Lutherville, MD

Ms. Carel Hedlund, Co-Chair

Green Sanctuary Committee

Bethesda Presbyterian Church

Bethesda, MD

Johanna Koolemans-Beynen

Coordinator and EarthCare Administrator

Social Action Group