

FAVORABLE: HB 171: Environmental Justice

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of House Bill 171 on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. As Waterkeepers work to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State, we are in support of ensuring communities are able to have an active, better-informed role in potential impacts to their community that could harm their health and welfare.

Maryland is already seeing significant impacts from climate change through flooding, more intense and more frequent severe storm events and so called “rain bombs” that pound small areas with several inches of rain in an hour or less. These impacts are not felt equally across the state and have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Many of these same communities are also subject to economic injustice through lack of investment, lower allocations of government resources and historic discriminatory practices such as redlining that have prevented economic growth.

We are deeply concerned about environmental justice and support the movement to correct these injustices through ensuring the “equal protection from environmental and public health hazards for all people regardless of race, income, culture, and social status,” as defined in Maryland law. While Maryland’s constitution requires equal protection under the law, it does not have substantive requirements to ensure environmental justice, nor to protect communities from disproportionate impacts from climate change.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake strongly believes that HB 171 would help further our goals of providing communities the opportunity to advocate for themselves and to be well informed, as well as taking a significant step towards achieving environmental justice.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 171.

Alexander Villazon
Waterkeepers Chesapeake