

March 8, 2022 - HEARING DATE: 3/10/2022

BILL: HB 171 - TITLE: Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act

POSITION: SUPPORT - COMMITTEE: Economic Matters Committee & Environment and Transportation

SPONSOR: Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo

I am writing to express my strong support for the 2022 Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act. As you know, climate change will have many serious adverse effects on Maryland, the United States, and the world. As a physician and a retired Navy officer, I am acutely aware of the dangers to public health and our national security. Climate change is one of the greatest threats to our public health. The health effects include more vector-borne disease, heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, injuries from wildfires and extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods, and mental health problems. These issues threaten the lives and health of all Maryland residents, particularly children and the elderly.

One thing that is less often recognized is the close tie between air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. 88% of Maryland residents live in areas that do not meet EPA air quality standards. Air pollution is a major contributor to absences from work and school, increased healthcare costs, and premature deaths. This can be seen clearly in the high rates of hospitalization for asthma in Maryland and especially in Baltimore. Research shows that decreases in air pollution lead to significant and rapid reductions in asthma hospitalizations. Improvements in health, especially in children, will be the first benefit we see from decreasing the use of fossil fuels.

Military and national security experts have known for years that climate change is a threat multiplier. It has been a factor in the conflict in Syria and the increasing number of migrants from Central America who are driven by poverty and hunger after years of drought. In Maryland, the most significant climate-related issues for the military are damage to bases located on or near the coast and heat waves that interfere with training and operations. I see it when I look at the places I've been stationed. In Bethesda, I see more black flag days when soldiers and sailors aren't permitted to exercise outdoors because of the danger from high temperatures.

In Annapolis, I see it in the rising sea level and flooding that threaten the Naval Academy. It is too late to prevent many of the effects of climate change, but if we act quickly, we can do a great deal to mitigate the effects and adapt to what we cannot avoid. I believe the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act would be a tremendous help in meeting the challenges we face. Putting a price on carbon is a step recommended by distinguished economists from both parties, including Nobel laureates. The dividends that the Climate Crisis and Education Act provides would protect low and middle-income Maryland families and energy-intensive trade-exposed businesses from any costs that might increase.

The money that goes into the Green Infrastructure Fund would help state and local governments make the investments Maryland needs to thrive in a low carbon economy by making improvements in energy and transportation, investing in vulnerable communities, and building resilience in communities throughout the state. Some may argue that Maryland only emits a small fraction of the United States' greenhouse gas emissions and does not need to do this. But we know that we only have a few short years to make major changes if we want to ensure a livable world for our children. We also know that our federal government is stuck in gridlock. Maryland can be a leader on this vital issue. That is an opportunity we must take for every person in Maryland and all who will come after us.

Respectfully submitted,

Frances Stewart, M.D.

Captain (retired), Medical Corps, United States Navy

301-718-0446

Cc: Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs