



# THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**BILL:** House Bill 0171 Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act

**SPONSOR:** Fraser-Hidalgo

**HEARING DATE:** March 10, 2022

**COMMITTEE:** Economic Matters

**CONTACT:** Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

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**POSITION:** SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

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The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS HB 0171, Climate Crisis and Environmental Just Act**, that will require the State to adopt a climate action plan mandating reduction of statewide greenhouse gas emissions by 60% over 2005 levels by 2030, net zero by 2040, and net-negative thereafter. The act also establishes a Climate Crisis Initiative lead by the Maryland Department of the Environment, and create a Climate Crisis Council to develop a plan to achieve greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals. HB 0171 is also cross-filed with SB 0135, Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act.

### High Level GHG Emissions Goals

HB 0171 initiates critical first steps towards establishing a state-wide mandate to reduce greenhouse gases (GHG). The bill also requires greenhouse gas reductions be achieved by a specific date with a set GHG reduction benchmark.

In acknowledgement of the escalating climate crisis and urgency to take immediate action, Prince George's County recently developed its own Climate Action Plan (CAP). The CAP calls for immediate transformational changes at all levels of County government and community to reduce county-wide and community driven greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. As a core tenant of the plan, both County government and residents must re-envision how we do business and live on a daily basis to reduce our carbon footprints. As a critical first step toward achieving its 2050 carbon neutrality, the CAP recommends a phased approach to achieve its goal of a 50% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030, compared to our 2005 level.

The County acknowledges that our actions alone will not achieve our ambitious GHG emission reductions and resilience goals. If the County is to successfully transition to economy-wide electrification, decarbonization, and achieve GHG reductions, the state must also enact many statewide measures to support local climate action efforts. By

requiring emission reductions by a specific date, Maryland is taking a critical step towards enabling local jurisdictions' efforts to reduce our own GHG footprints.

#### Critical Infrastructure Investment in Environmental Justice Burdened Communities

Bill HB 0171 also seeks to support local governments addressing long standing environmental justice issues by the creation of a Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund. The fund will provide substantial and ongoing funding specifically dedicated to low-income and vulnerable residents to help ensure a more just transition to renewable energy and to build community-wide resilience. To create a sustainable funding source, the bill attaches fees to all fossil fuel use and even its transport though the state. Fees for fossil fuel use will provide a sustainable funding mechanism to make climate resilient infrastructure changes. The specific allocations of funds enables the targeting of communities most in need of investment: specifically, at least 50% of the money in the infrastructure fund shall be invested in projects that are located within, and provide meaningful benefits to, environmental justice populations.

The County uses equity and environmental justice considerations to drive implementation and prioritize climate action programmatic efforts. Though Prince George's County is among nation's wealthiest majority African American communities, it also has the lowest average income in the DC metro area and has both urban and rural census tracts with environmental justice equity challenges.

Our county's residents have long experienced the negative externalities of fossil fuel burning power plants, while reaping none of the economic value. The census tracts with the worst environmental problems are also often those with the lowest income populations- meaning that the transition to electrification will be the most difficult. This situation represents a significant impediment to making a stronger transition to clean energy and will only widen the gaps between the wealthy and those of moderate and low incomes.

The County encourages the legislature to continue to be mindful of the need to include people from environmental justice communities in the decision-making process especially as it relates to identifying criteria for project eligibility for the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund. People at the most risk must be part of the conversation and help shape the right solutions for their communities.

#### Recommended Amendments

The County recommends that municipal landfills that produce methane gas be specifically excluded from the report described in 12-1223.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 0171** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.