

My name is Sophia D'Alonzo. I've lived in Maryland my entire life and am now a sophomore at the University of Maryland. I'm pursuing a double degree in political communication and environmental science and policy. Among other campus groups, I'm involved in the MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition, or MSCAC. We represent a coalition of youth activists from each public university in Maryland working to enact legislative action against climate change. We wrote and proposed the FUTURE Act, which will be deliberated in this Spring's Maryland General assembly. I am so proud of and amazed by the tireless passion and perseverance of my fellow students organizing around sustainability and environmental justice.

As young people, we are anxious that we won't have a future because of our society's persistent reliance on fossil fuels. We are anxious that the coasts we love will come underwater, that our wildlife will become extinct, and that our planet won't be the same beautiful experience for our children to come. We are seeing the suffering caused by devastating flooding, forest fires, and droughts across the world. We know that things will only continue to worsen- and we are frustrated by the lack of action and accountability. There are many students and young people, like me, who have already experienced repeated climate disasters.

I grew up and reside in Ellicott City, Maryland: a small town west of Baltimore that is predisposed to catastrophic flash flooding events. Our historic Main Street is located in the floodplain of the Tiber and the Patapsco rivers. We've seen 18 major floods in our town's history, but our most recent floods have been uniquely devastating. In 2016, we experienced a once-in-a-thousand-year flood that washed away buildings and took lives. Our streets and floorboards were torn apart, cars were swept down the street, and many businesses could no longer operate. The aftermath was heartbreaking. Residents who had spent decades growing their small businesses were forced to close up shop after a single, traumatic night. In 2018, we experienced a second 1,000-year flood- this one even more destructive than the 2016 flood merely two years before. Many more businesses were forced to close their doors. Five years later, our town's economy and infrastructure are still rebuilding. I, like many of my local friends and family, still feel a pang in my stomach when the forecast calls for heavy rain. For every degree that average temperatures in an area increase, the atmosphere carries roughly 4% more water vapor. These severe flash flooding conditions in Ellicott City are only exacerbated by our warming climate and unsustainable development. Without climate action, the beautiful Main Street I call home- the place where I've grown up and made so many memories- may soon cease to exist.

Now, more than ever, we are obligated to raise our voices and fight for a livable future. We are at a critical point and we have the power to decide what course of action we take. Right now, I should be sitting in my economics class, trying not to fall asleep as my professor explains supply and demand curves. Instead, I stand here urging you to listen to the anxiety of young people and act to preserve our planet. Young people like me are the leaders of the climate movement because inaction today hijacks our future tomorrow. I call upon our legislators to ensure that my generation and those to come have a safe and healthy future. Thank you.