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Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB 687 – “Department of the Environment – Zero-Emission Medium and Heavy Duty Vehicles – Regulations (Zero-Emission Truck Act of 2022)”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 24, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB 687 and considers it to be one of our high priority bills this session. SB 687 would require the Maryland Department of the Environment to adopt the Advanced Clean Truck (ACT) Rule by the end of this year. The rule would require all manufacturers that sell medium and heavy-duty trucks and school buses in the state to sell an increasing annual percentage of zero-emission trucks and school buses beginning in Model Year 2026 and concluding in 2035. The rule would increase the percentage of new zero-emission trucks and school buses required to be sold each year at a pace that would be gradual and technologically feasible.

Transportation is the largest source of climate-damaging greenhouse gas (CO₂) emissions and a leading source of toxic air pollution that is hazardous to human health. Trucks account for 10% of the vehicles on the road but contribute 30% of greenhouse gas emissions and 57% of tiny particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution emitted by the entire transportation sector in the U.S., along with high levels of nitrogen oxide (NO_x) and other pollutants. These toxic pollutants are linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, other respiratory diseases, and premature death. Residential neighborhoods located near major roads, highways, and warehouses, which often are communities of color due to decades of discriminatory housing, face a disproportionate burden from transportation pollution, and the health of their residents has suffered more than the general populations because of this.

Electric trucks produce no tailpipe emissions and are increasingly available. There are over 100 models from more than 30 manufacturers that are currently on the market or will be before 2024.

Section 177 of the Clean Air Act allows California to set its own vehicle emission standards that are more strict than federal standards, but no other state is allowed to set its own emission standards. However, states can choose to follow and adopt California’s more strict vehicle emission standards, as Maryland and a number of other states have done. In 2020, California set the first-in-the-nation zero-emission standards for medium and heavy-duty trucks sold in their state through adoption of the ACT Rule. Since then, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington have adopted the same ACT rule, and a number of other states are considering doing so, too.

Companies across the nation are increasingly demanding electric trucks and vans to help them meet their climate and pollution goals, and to save on the costs of fuel and maintenance. More than 70 major corporations that have large truck fleets, including IKEA and Nestle, signed a letter urging state governors to accelerate the growth of electric trucks by adopting the ACT Rule.

By requiring the electrification of school buses and large pickup trucks, drayage, delivery, and semi-trailer trucks sold in Maryland, the ACT Rule would be a crucial step in the effort to combat climate change and reduce the toxic air pollution that makes us sick. Passage of SB 687 would be good for our health and the environment. We urge a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.