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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB471 “Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act”

Position: Support with amendments

Hearing Date: February 15, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports passing SB 471, which will move the public colleges and universities in the state of Maryland towards carbon neutrality by 2035. The approach detailed in this legislation is achievable, having been implemented in large part by the University of Maryland with a plan to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2025.¹ The Sierra Club is grateful to UMD’s leadership in this area as well as to student organizations such as MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition (MSCAC) which are utilizing their agency to remind public colleges and universities of their guiding principles.

Climate change will not wait for us to act. With thousands of miles of shoreline, Maryland is one of the most vulnerable U.S. states to the effects of sea-level rise caused by climate change. Rural communities will also be impacted as increased extreme weather events and changes in climate patterns disrupt planting and harvesting cycles and cause crop and livestock loss. Climate change and air pollutants from fossil fuels additionally make low-income and minority communities more vulnerable to asthma and other medical conditions that exacerbate the effects of diseases like COVID-19. We must act swiftly and decisively to protect and restore our climate, so that those that will inherit it can enjoy climate stability.

Institutions of higher education play a leading role in Maryland and around the world as beacons of research and societal progress. These public institutions have massive carbon footprints due to their high-tech research facilities, other building energy use, and transportation needs.

This bill makes Maryland public universities leaders in carbon reductions and climate justice by:

- Requiring carbon neutrality by 2035 (scopes 1 and 2 by 2025)
- Establishing an Environmental and Economic Justice Scholarship Fund for in-state students displaced by climate change or from environmental justice communities
- Facilitating the sharing of best practices and resources through establishing offices of sustainability at each institution

¹ “Climate Action Plan 2.0.” *Climate Action Plan* | Office of Sustainability, University of Maryland Office of Sustainability, <https://sustainingprogress.umd.edu/progress-commitments/climate-action-plan/>.

- Conducting a feasibility and implementation study for a sustainability education requirement for each institution

While the Sierra Club supports the bill, we recommend amending the bill to:

- Ensure costs of this program are funded by the state and not an additional direct pass-through cost to students.
- Define carbon emissions in terms of a standard rather than with language which could be misinterpreted such as “refrigerants and chemicals” (15-134, A-4-II-5)
- Ensure that the carbon offset standards named are peer reviewed and certified to allow for simplified management and verification of the program

Thank you for your consideration of our views and recommendations.

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