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Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB 126 – “Environment – New Motor Vehicles – Pollution Fee”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 15, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB 126, which would authorize the Department of the Environment to impose a one-time pollution fee on certain new passenger vehicles and light trucks sold or registered in the State. The pollution fee would be based on the volume of carbon dioxide tailpipe exhaust emitted by different vehicles as determined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, with the most polluting vehicles incurring the highest pollution fee. The money collected from the pollution fee would be deposited in the Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund and be used to provide rebates on the sale of electric vehicles (EVs), purchase electric transit and school buses, and expand EV infrastructure.

The pollution fee in the bill, with the sponsor’s proposed amendment, would be based on the 10-point greenhouse gas emissions rating scale of EPA that can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-rating>. The fee would be \$450 for vehicles that pollute the most and have a greenhouse gas rating of “1”. The fee would decrease by \$50 for each subsequent rating through “5” which means the lowest pollution fee would be \$250. There would be no pollution fee for vehicles that receive an EPA greenhouse gas rating between 6 and 10.

The pollution fee would not be assessed on commercial vehicles used for transporting goods, agricultural vehicles, public transportation vehicles, ambulances, or state, county or municipality-owned vehicles not used strictly as passenger vehicles.

The transportation sector is the largest contributor to Maryland’s climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. Our state’s Greenhouse Gas Inventory shows that gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles account for 89% of the pollution generated by the transportation sector. Tailpipe emissions from these vehicles are also hazardous to human health. They contribute to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, and other respiratory diseases. More than 80% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet federal EPA clean air standards for ozone, due in large part to motor vehicle tailpipe emissions.

The ideal solution to reduce harmful tailpipe emissions would be to get Maryland residents out of their cars and onto public transit, as well as riding bikes and walking. Enacting a pollution fee based on the amount of greenhouse gas tailpipe emissions from a vehicle would be a reasonable way to provide an incentive to people buying a vehicle to purchase a more fuel-efficient model, such as an EV.

In summary, requiring owners of high-polluting vehicles that are damaging our climate and health to pay a pollution fee based on the amount of greenhouse gases their new vehicles are emitting makes sense – especially when the funds collected can help purchase emission-free EVs and expand the EV infrastructure in the state. 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.