

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB0471– Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act

Dear Chairman Pinsky and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

The St. Mary's College of Maryland Student Government Association works in the interest of and represents our student body. Our goal as an organization is to address concerns and better relationships between our students, staff, and administration as well as foster a safe community. The Environmental Protection Committee is a collection of students within SGA that desire to help better environmental practices on campus. It is a group made of SGA senators and St. Mary's students. As a committee, we strive to uphold the environmental integrity of our institution. We do this through policy review and initiating change that helps our school increase sustainable practices. We serve as a forum for new ideas involving the preservation, protection, and improvement of the general ecosystem of our campus, outlying community, and the St. Mary's River.

The MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition (MSCAC) is an environmental activist organization that has representatives from ten schools in Maryland and 200+ supporters. This campaign began in 2020, and it is driven by progressive ideas, bold actions, and a strong foundation of collegiate student support. MSCAC's organizational goals include accelerated climate action for state, environmental justice and education initiatives. From rising sea levels to harming our ecological systems, climate change is happening now and is getting worse at an alarming rate. Although we might not be seeing the direct impacts of climate change now, if we do not take action as soon as possible, our way of life will soon be interrupted by the changes happening in our environment. St. Mary's College is located in rural Southern Maryland, right on the St. Mary's River. We realize that if we do not take action to keep climate change at bay, we are putting our environment, campus community, and the local off-campus community at risk. Furthermore, rural regions are experiencing high heat temperatures that can lead to droughts and cause significant damage to our agricultural lands. This would affect our access to local natural resources, including our food supply chain.

Here at St Mary's, we have hundreds of students living on campus that trust our institution to provide them a safe and healthy environment. We want to ensure that everybody is nurtured and protected and that the detrimental effects of climate change aren't inhibiting and harming our students. We acknowledge that it is up to our generation to take substantial action against the issue of climate change and to protect our campus, our state, our country, and our world from its detrimental effects. This is necessary if we want future generations to have access to the same resources we do today. Institutions of higher education play a leading role in Maryland and around the world as beacons of research and societal progress. Public universities have a responsibility to protect, educate, and create well-rounded and well-informed future leaders of the state. These public institutions have massive carbon footprints due to their high-tech research facilities, energy needs, and transportation needs. **The University System of Maryland emits more carbon than all other state agencies combined.**

Youth are utilizing their agency to remind public research institutions of their guiding principles. This legislation will ensure that universities will lead the way in carbon neutrality, address climate change while addressing climate justice, and empower students and institutions.

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

By working towards carbon neutrality, the safety and health of our Maryland public universities will be improved. We align our goals with those stated by the MSCAC, specifically their mission to expand sustainable education initiatives for students in Maryland. The people of the St. Mary's College of Maryland community are demanding climate action to prevent further damage from occurring to not only their community and health, but to the organisms that share the environment. St. Mary's College of Maryland SGA urges policy-makers to adopt MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition's SB0471 -Facilitating University Transformations by Unifying Reductions in Emissions (FUTURE) Act

Sincerely,



Erin Lanham, Student Government Association President



Dylan Parham, Student Government Association Vice President



Emily Rudo, Student Government Association Senate Leader

The Environmental Protection Committee

Meghan Stevens, LQ Senator

Alexander Behzadi, 2022 Class President

Nicole Gibson, Student Representative