



*Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

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## **HB 596 Constitutional Amendment—Environmental Rights**

**Hearing Date: 2/23/22**

**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Position: Favorable**

Thank you, Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. We submit this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association to express our SUPPORT for HB 596 – the Maryland Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Rights. Our organization is committed to improving population health and reducing health disparities, so we appreciate this bill’s purpose to recognize that all Marylanders deserve the right to live in a healthful environment. We view this bill as an important tool for all Marylanders, as well as public health professionals, to both protect public health and address health disparities.

This bill has been introduced because the burden from environmental pollutants on low and middle-income households, neighborhoods, and communities is disproportionate, costly, and must be addressed. These communities suffer at higher rates from environmental health effects such as asthma, heart disease, nervous system damage, and kidney damage caused by pollution. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of such hazards. To protect the health of residents in lower-income communities, which in turn saves medical costs, requires the promise of environmental safety with legislated environmental human rights. The recognition that Maryland must protect its natural resources such as water, air, and land, while addressing a variety of environmental impacts to our climate is both practical and essential.

There is also a growing abundance of waste and trash in our great state. There has been an increase of pollution across multiple highways, byways, backroads and the Baltimore–Washington Parkway. All of these pollutants contribute to further environmental degradation and related health effects. Our former Governor William Donald Schaeffer’s motto was to make “Maryland Beautiful”. We should carry on his legacy and uphold this standard as a model for our nation. Marylanders deserve to live in an environment free of pollution, free from congestion, and with the chance to thrive in a clean environment. As Kira Simpson states, “We can sit back, do nothing, and watch our planet be destroyed. Or we can take action, become advocates, and start making lifestyle choices which are kinder to people and the planet.”

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your support of HB 596 - Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights during this 2022 legislative session as we face the profound and broad impacts that a compromised public health system has had on Marylanders.

*The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.*