



## HB596 Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights

Environment and Transportation Committee

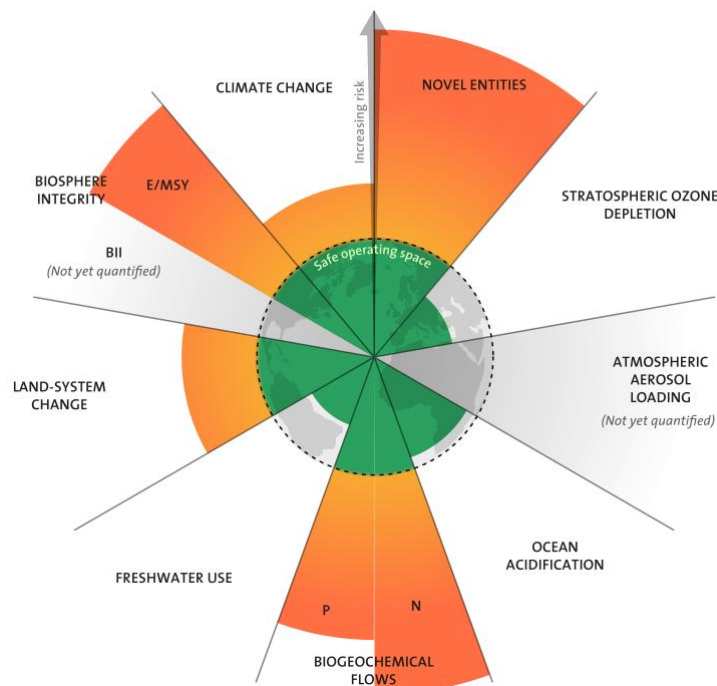
**Position: FAVORABLE**

Hearing Date 2.23.2022

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice-Chair Stein and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Everything we do, everything we own, every breath we take is a gift of the environment. Each moment of our lives we are beholden to the earth. And to the countless generations of our ancestors who did not despoil the earth for their own use, leaving us with inhospitable land or fouled water or fetid air or an unstable climate. They used the land in a way that benefited them and yet remained fertile and healthy for the generations to come.

As our ancestors did for us, so we must do for our children.



The 9 planetary boundaries we exceed at our peril.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an unprecedented explosion of human ingenuity and technology. But it also witnessed an abuse of the earth, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes brazenly. In both cases, the earth and its resources were treated as a commodity instead of a living entity that needs to be treated with care. The earth was big and indestructible, we thought, and there to be dug out, burned up and dumped into. As a result, we have endangered the very operating systems that keep this earth habitable for humanity.

We now know what we need to do, technologically and politically. We need new methods and approaches of running a modern society, and we need practical laws that will better guide such behavior and hold government, corporations and all of us responsible for protecting this fragile world of us. That is the work you do every day on this committee.

But we also need something more to underpin and anchor those laws. We need the assertion of a foundational right to a healthful environment to be placed in the bedrock legal covenant of our society, our constitution. We need this right to secure the practical laws you pass, to encourage the consideration and passage of additional laws over time despite the political winds that blow or the emergence of unforeseen developments, to protect those laws from possible future encroachment and to ensure their effective and equitable enforcement.

Other written testimonies to HB596 ably and compellingly make the case for environmental health and justice, and answer practical and legal questions you may have about this amendment. I cannot improve upon them.

I seek to focus here on another reason: rights codified in our constitution are more than laws. They are the mores, the values, the cultural DNA of our society. To place this amendment in our state constitution does more than make environmental health an actionable right, although it does that too. Like freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and more, this amendment helps define who we are, what we hold dear, and what rights - by birth - we possess.

Everyone individually and all of us together have this right and must protect it on behalf of everyone today and those yet to come.

That is what this amendment is designed to do. This right is being recognized around the world, in the United Nations and here in the United States. This amendment is being recognized in Maryland and one day will ultimately be placed in our constitution. Let it be on your watch.

I ask that you vote for this amendment, and send it to the people decide.

Nina Beth Cardin, Director

Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights