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HB 0596 Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights

Hearing Date: 2/23/22, 1pm

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Position: SUPPORT

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

The Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) strongly supports HB 0596 Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights, which would establish the fundamental right for every person to a healthy and sustainable environment and require the State to conserve and protect the environment for people now and in the future.

Access to clean water, air, and land and adequate food are essential to human health. The environments in which people live, work, learn, and play can greatly affect one's ability to live a healthy life. This Amendment would provide constitutionally based protections, solidifying the right to a healthful environment.

Maryland is a leader in advancing environmental safeguards that protect human health. However, even with Maryland's robust existing environmental protection laws, people who live in the state are still experiencing exposures to environmental toxins that affect their health. Communities in the state are still struggling with access to clean drinking water or living next to highly contaminated sites that are harming human health. Air pollution contributes to an increase in asthma attacks in children and premature death. This Amendment makes explicit the State's role as a steward of our environment and the constitutional obligation to protect this right, so that we can protect communities experiencing environmental exposures threatening health.

Environmental pollution does not affect everyone equally. Communities of color and low-income communities bear a disproportionate burden from the pollution caused by polluting facilities, vehicle exhausts, inefficient landfills and incineration emissions, and out-of-date building construction. Current state environmental protections do not consider the cumulative impacts of environmental exposures, nor do they focus on preventing environmental exposures first. These gaps allow harmful pollution and



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environmental degradation to advance unaddressed. As we see in other areas of law, such as civil rights, these gaps can best be addressed by the overarching protections provided by the state constitution's Declaration of Rights. This is critical to achieving environmental justice and health equity in the state and ensuring communities no longer bear the burden of disproportionate impacts to environmental exposures.

We must make it our focus to protect and improve the health of all Marylanders, which should include protecting the right to a healthy environment. The Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments urges you to vote favorably for HB 0596.

About the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

The Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments is the only national nursing organization focused solely on the intersection of health and the environment. The mission of the Alliance is to promote healthy people and healthy environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, incorporating evidence-based practice, and influencing policy.

<http://enviRN.org>