MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Kumar P. Barve, Chair
           Delegate Dana Stein, Vice Chair
           Environment and Transportation Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)
DATE: 2/21/2022
RE: HB0596 Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights

<u>The MLLC supports HB0596 Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights</u>

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0596.

Pollution is concentrated in communities of color and those with low incomes across the state, including Baltimore City, Charles County, Prince George's County and the Eastern Shore. Heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer, premature births, childhood obesity, autism, and dementia; are some of the side effects which people living near high levels of air pollution must endure. Pollution hits Latinos harder than almost anyone in the country: 2 in 5 Latinos live within 30 miles of a power plant.

In 1973, the General Assembly passed the Maryland Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) which states that "each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment"). Yet MEPA only articulates this right as a policy. It has lacked enforcement over the past half-century. This bill will put MEPA's language in the Declaration of Rights of the constitution, by adding two new protections in the Declaration of Rights.

● Each person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and stable environment.

● The state is the trustee of Maryland's natural resources, including its air, lands, waters, wildlife, and ecosystems, protecting them for both current and future generations. Moreover, this constitutional amendment would provide necessary guideposts for the adoption and implementation of future environmental laws and policy. Environmental human rights are emerging as the foundation for strengthening all manner of environmental protections. And critical for today, Environmental Human Rights can fight for environmental justice, addressing problems such as cumulative impacts caused by regrettable historic decisions such as clustering polluting sources in communities of color and low-income communities. Overall, this amendment will clarify the state's environmental priorities, guide and strengthen subsequent legislation, and codify the state's public trust obligations.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges a favorable report on HB0596.