



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 880 – Environment – Impact of Actions on Climate, Labor, and Environmental Justice (“Maryland Climate Equity Act”)

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 2, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report for the Maryland Climate Equity Act, HB 880, which would provide quantifiable means for state agencies to assess a proposed action’s potential impacts on the climate, overburdened communities, underserved communities, and workers in Maryland.

Maryland’s state agencies play a key role in a range of decisions that affect communities, such as approving locations for energy generating facilities, highways, industrial facilities, and waste incinerators. Historically, many of these decisions have negatively and disproportionately impacted communities of color and overburdened, low-income communities.

In 2022, we are in the midst of a climate crisis and national reckoning with social injustice. Yet, under current law, state agencies do not have to meaningfully consider their decisions’ climate and job impacts nor how their decisions may contribute to environmental injustice by concentrating polluting or dangerous facilities in certain neighborhoods.

The result is that state actions continue contributing to public health disparities for communities of color, low-income, and limited English proficiency, as well as other underserved communities. These communities are disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards that include exposure to polluted air, waterways, and landscapes and other negative outcomes. These hazards create disparities in health, wealth, and even life expectancy.

The Climate Equity Act would address these issues by defining underserved and overburdened communities in a clear and quantifiable manner; by requiring state units to evaluate whether an action negatively impacts: the climate, labor and employment, environmental justice, and any designated underserved or overburdened communities; and by creating assessment and reporting requirements that would allow decisionmakers to recognize and thereby minimize or avoid climate and labor harms and disproportionate negative impacts on overburdened and underserved communities.

House Bill 880 is an affirmative step toward addressing hidden biases in decision making that have historically allowed sacrifice zones and disproportionate harms to certain communities as well as disregard for the climate. We urge a favorable report on HB 880 and the Committee’s strong support for prompt enactment of this long overdue bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.