

March 8, 2022

Dear Chair Senator Smith, Vice-Chair Senator Waldstreicher, Senators of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Chair Senator Pinsky, Vice-Chair Senator Kagan, and Senators of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

We, the undersigned civic leaders across Maryland, urge the Maryland General Assembly to pass SB783, the Environmental Human Rights Amendment in 2022.

The amendment would ensure that (1) each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and sustainable environment, and (2) the state, as trustee, shall protect, conserve, and enhance Maryland's natural resources, including its air, water, lands, wildlife, and ecosystems, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The state of Maryland recognized that "each person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment," when it passed the Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973. Unfortunately, the Act has not been sufficiently effective.

By elevating the right to a healthful environment to the same level as such fundamental rights as freedoms of the press, religion, and speech, the Amendment will provide constitutionally based protections in addition to those set forth in existing environmental laws and regulations. The Amendment also makes explicit the State's trustee role as a steward of our environment and the constitutional obligation to protect this right.

These principles will strengthen the basis for addressing the cumulative effects of legacy pollution that disproportionately impact many of our minority and low-income communities, and will steer Maryland toward true sustainability. They will provide a solid foundation for improved laws, regulations and programs at all levels of government, and the additional scrutiny that comes from constitutional provisions will serve as a guardrail against the most egregious forms of harmful action, protecting all Marylanders, now and in future generations.

Similar amendments have been constructive and responsible contributors to the environmental and governmental frameworks of other states (Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) that have adopted them. New York State adopted its version of the amendment in November 2021, with 68.9 percent of voters approving it.

We ask that you support and pass SB783, the Environmental Human Rights Amendment in 2022. Our communities, especially those that are marginalized, our children, our grandchildren, and future generations need us to act now.

Maryland Civic and Community Leaders

The Honorable Jud Ashman, Mayor of Gaithersburg
The Honorable Bennard Cann, Mayor of Morningside
The Honorable Jacob Day, Mayor of Salisbury
The Honorable Jeffrey Slavin, Mayor of Somerset
The Honorable Kate Stewart, Mayor of Takoma Park
The Honorable Noah Waters, Mayor of Eagle Harbor
The Honorable Patrick Wojahn, Mayor of College Park

Councilman Mark Conway, Baltimore City Council, District 4
Councilman Jack Heath, President of Salisbury City Council
Councilman Izzy Patoka, Baltimore County Council
Councilmember Danny Schaible, Hyattsville City Council
Councilmember Jimmy Tarlau, Mount Rainier
The City of Salisbury Sustainability Advisory Committee
Adrian Boafo, Mayor Pro Tem, Bowie
Nina Forsythe, Commissioner of Water, Parks, and Recreation, City of Frostburg
Chloe Malouf, Vice Chairperson, City of Gaithersburg's Environmental Affairs Committee

President Terrence Sawyer, Loyola University Maryland
Barry Hill, Adjunct Professor of Law, Vermont Law School/MDEHR Advisor
Patricia Pittman, Fitzhugh Mullan Professor, Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Wash. University
Darian Unger, Professor, Howard University
Dr. Sacoby Miguel Wilson, Associate Professor, UMD School of Public Health

Thomas Croghan, MD, Winemaker - The Vineyards of Dodon, Vice President - Future Harvest
Nicholas John Davenport, Social Worker
Nicholas DiPasquale, Director, Chesapeake Bay Program Office (retired)
Gwen DuBois, MD, MPH, President, Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Andy Ellis, Vice President, Waltherson Improvement Association
Rob Etgen, Founding President, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (retired)
Terrence Fitzgerald, MD, Treasurer, Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Willie Flowers, President, NAACP Maryland State Conference
Wayne Gilchrest, former U.S. Congressman, Maryland District 1 (retired)
Brooke Harper, Environmental Advocate
Pastor Mark Harper, Takoma Park Presbyterian Church
Staci Hartwell, Chair Environmental and Climate Justice Committee, NAACP Maryland State Conference
Rosa Hance, Chair, Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club
Rachel M. Hopp, Former Federal Environmental Program Manager and Enforcement Attorney/MDEHR Advisor
Steven W. Jones, Board President, Future Harvest
Bob Kambic, Visiting Scientist
Matthew Littleton, Environmental Lawyer/MDEHR Advisor
Rabbi Richard Marker
The Rev Richard D. Meadows Jr., Rector, The Historic St. James Episcopal Church
Arthur Milholland, Physician
Vernice Miller-Travis, Executive Vice President, Metropolitan Group
Ava Annette Richardson, PGC NAACP Liaison
Virginia Rodino, APALA Maryland Chapter President
Pastor Chris Schaefer, Divinity Lutheran Church, Towson MD
Martin Siegel, Environmental Lawyer/MDEHR Advisor
Dorothy Valakos, Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional
Rev. David James Ware, The Church of the Redeemer, Baltimore
Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt