

Judicial Proceedings and Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committees  
SB783  
The Washington College Student Government Association  
Hearing Date: 3.9.22  
Favorable

Chairmen Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kaga, Honorable  
Committee Members

The Washington College Student Government Association strongly expresses our support for HB596/SB783 - *Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights*. In November of 2021, our Student Government Association created “A Resolution of Support for the Maryland Campaign for Human Environmental Rights” which was unanimously passed by the Senate Body to voice our college’s support for this amendment and the importance of environmental human rights.

Two of the main pillars of our college are sustainability and justice. As a student body motivated by these values, we are concerned by the current status of our world and climate. We are located on the Chester River and have witnessed the environmental injustice inflicted on our communities: flooding, severe storms, and water quality issues have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities in Chestertown. As students, we have worked to bring awareness to these issues, researched the impact on our communities, and innovated ways to decrease our impact on the environment. However, the lack of legal framework and support from the State have created barriers for addressing environmental injustice in our community.

We believe this bill is essential to ensuring environmental equity in our community and throughout the State by constitutionally recognizing Marylanders’ right to a healthful and sustainable environment. This amendment would create a legal framework that would uphold the environmental values of this state that current laws do not.

We know Maryland is committed to a healthful environment. Environmental consciousness was shown in the passage of “The Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973,” which states that “each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment,” and many other efforts to support our environment, but these have fallen short because of the lack of a legal backing to support them. As members of the Maryland Senate, you have the responsibility to address the current issues of this state and it better for the following generations; this bill is your opportunity to fulfill that responsibility.

Our generation is committed to addressing the issues caused by climate change, environmental degradation, and environmental injustices. As college students, we are the future of our local communities, state, and country. As future leaders, we show our commitment to creating and maintaining a healthful environment. As the current leaders of our state, we hope you recognize the importance of supporting this legislation so we can work together to protect the environment, the next generation, and all Marylanders that have been and will be impacted by environmental degradation.

Alongside this testimony, we submit “A Resolution of Support for the Maryland Campaign for Human Environmental Rights.” which was passed unanimously by our Senate Body. (attached)

Submitted on behalf of the Washington College Student Government Association by,  
Maegan White | Secretary of Service and Community Relations  
Kevin Denice | Chair of the Environmental Committee

**A Resolution of Support for the Maryland Campaign for Human  
Environmental Rights Submitted to the Washington College Senate  
Norman James Theater, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Background:** The Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973 states that “each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment,” but this law did not create legal standing for the law to be enforceable and effective. However, the addition of a constitutional amendment that recognizes these rights would create the legal precedent and backing to protect the environmental rights of all Marylanders. The Maryland Campaign for Human Environmental Rights, a non-partisan advocacy group, is proposing that the following be added as an amendment to the Maryland Constitution:

1. That each person, as a matter of human dignity, has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment, and;
2. That State of Maryland, as a trustee, shall conserve, manage and enhance Maryland’s natural and cultural resources including the air, land, water, and ecosystems for the benefit of both present and future generations. The creation of the constitutional amendment would guide future legislation and regulations, improve environmental and public health, and give an avenue for residents of Maryland to address and correct environmental injustice and degradation issues. Maryland would be following the lead of the United Nations Human Rights Council, seven other states that have such provisions in their constitutions, and fourteen other states that are considering similar legislation.

**WHEREAS,** Washington College recognizes Environmental Action as one of its five Washington College Standards and therefore supporting and advocating for the legislation demonstrates Washington College students’ commitment to our college’s Standards; and

**WHEREAS,** the Washington College student body is environmentally motivated to mitigate environmental degradation, address environmental injustice, and make our college and community more environmentally conscious and friendly, as demonstrated through the actions of organizations like the Student Environmental Alliance, SGA Environmental Committee, Environmental Science and Studies Department, and other environmental clubs; and

**WHEREAS,** the Chestertown community shares similar values around environmental stewardship and Chestertown has a unique environment that is incredibly valuable to the culture, history, and beauty of the town that most residents deem worthy of protection; and

**WHEREAS**, lack of environmental action of past generations has disproportionately impacted younger generations and underrepresented groups, creating major environmental injustice issues; and

**WHEREAS**, it is essential that the state provides and recognizes the rights of all residents and, since the current laws fall short of adequately protecting the “healthful environment” promised in the Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973, it is essential that the state passes stronger legislation that fully recognizes and enforces the rights of Marylanders, and

**WHEREAS**, the creation and passage of this resolution could serve as a collaborative template for other colleges and institutions to pass similar efforts and engage young people in this process.

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT**, the Washington College Student Government Association expresses their full support for the environmental constitutional amendment brought by the Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights; and

**LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT**, the Senate commits to showing our continual support for this necessary legislation by partnering with other colleges and universities; tabling at Hodson to bring awareness to the legislation; hosting and attending seminars and public forums to generate awareness and knowledge of the issue; organizing and attending lobbying days in Annapolis during the spring semester; and engaging in other activities and events that generate support and awareness around the issues; and

**LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT**, this resolution of support will be sent to all of Maryland’s Eastern Shore elected officials, and that Maegan White, the Secretary of Service and Community Relations and Alexa Venturato, the Secretary of the Environment, and the respective Senate committees will lead these initiatives and encourage their predecessors to do the same during officer transition.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

Maegan White | Secretary of Service and Community Relations

Alexa Venturato | Secretary of the Environment

**Respectfully Cosigned,**

Service and Community Relations Committee

Environmental Committee

Constitutional Review Committee

Kat DeSantis | SGA President

Nali Gowon | Secretary of Diversity and Inclusion

Liz Hay | SGA Director of Communications and Marketing  
Natalie Wisnoski | Parliamentarian  
Emily Hurley | President of Composting Team Club  
Marianne Herbst | President of Wildlife Conservation Club  
Alaina Perdon | President of WC Chapter Food Recovery Network  
Emma Cease | Student Director of Sustainability and the Food Initiative

**Unanimously Approved,**

Washington College Student Government Association Senators