

SB 0783
Mary D Gaut
Favorable

For years I have worked with Presbyterian congregations in Maryland as they seek ways to more fully embrace what we believe is a divine mandate to care for each other and for the world that was created and still is good. Those who I talk to know deep in their hearts that this is not an optional faith practice. It is a core understanding of who we are and how we are to live. They become frustrated when public debate frames issues in terms winners and losers. They instinctively know that when it comes to issues of public health and environmental sustainability thoughtful and robust action creates only winners.

The beauty of this proposed amendment is that it is unambivalent and framed in the language of core the values of caring for the other as much as we care for ourselves...something shared by all major religious traditions, not just my own. When this is recognized as a priority and is accepted as the non-negotiable standard of community organization, it is much easier to work through the economic and regulatory details.

The late Stephen Covey included in his famous “7 Habits of Effective People, the essential practice of “putting first things first,” “making the main thing the main thing,” and letting policy and program flow from that. The state constitution is where we enshrine the MAIN things. And guaranteeing the fundamental right to a healthy and sustainable environment for all, including future generations, is surely a MAIN thing.

The citizens of Maryland should have the chance to affirm this core value and place it where it belongs...at the constitutional level. We the people should be granted the opportunity to say aloud what we truly believe: that, in the language of the amendment: *every person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and sustainable environment. ...and that the state’s natural resources must be conserved for the benefit of every person, including present and future generations.*

To refuse to let this amendment come before the voters is essentially to say that some people do not deserve clean air and water and that it is OK for them to be sacrificed to the self-interest of others. I want to trust that this is not what this committee or the General Assembly will conclude. If it is, it is a tragic moment which will compromise the lives of generations to come.

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