

STUDENT – Javier Fuentes
Testimony HB531
Ways and Means Committee
Position: Support
February 17, 2022

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I Strongly urge your support of HB531 “Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education Grant – Funding and Evaluation – Extension.”

My name is Javier Fuentes, I am a Junior at Laurel High School in Prince George’s County. I am the President of the Green Club at my school. We became a Maryland Green School in 2017 and have recertified in 2021. I have been the Green Club president with an executive team, two faculty advisors, and around 50 students who show up regularly to meetings once a week after school. During covid and online learning, we had many students attending meetings. Virtually, we participated in citizen science activities such as iNaturalist, initiated school wide engagement in environmental projects like recycling materials through art, but we know we can do more.

Transitioning out of the pandemic and into in-person learning gives me hope for what other students and I can accomplish. Seeing students happy to attend meetings to recycle across the school, and seeing them excited for the hands-on experience that they expect from the Green Club is what brings me here in support of extended funding for MAEOE so that we can have more of these hands-on experiences.

Supporting this bill means that student activities like field trips, activities that not only boost student morale but also improve students' environmental knowledge, would happen across Maryland.

The Green Club and Maryland Green Schools have connected me to other schools in Prince George’s County and now across the state. Youth voice is important for the future of the environment, and the MAEOE youth council is giving me another outlet to bond with my peers and to be part of discussions, strategy, and planning, and implementation of environmental work in our state.

My community, friends, family, and MAEOE have all given me the courage to lead.

Our future needs more students to be involved at school and in the community. The work that MAEOE is doing helps students like me have the tools equipped to build a sustainable life for ourselves and others. This is why I support and urge a favorable report on this bill.

Javier Fuentes, Junior, Laurel High School