



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB743 - Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023
Organization: Climate Justice Wing of the Maryland Legislative Coalition
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 23, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB743. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on SB743.

The MLC Climate Justice Wing supports policies that benefit overburdened and underserved communities, which have historically sustained disproportionate environmental harm. By definition, “overburdened communities” are in census tracts that are disproportionately affected by more environmental health indicators. “Underserved communities” are in census tracts with a higher number of low-income residents who are also nonwhite and have limited English-proficiency. SB743 will help address environmental injustice at the permitting level for projects that impact the land, air, and water (e.g., industrial and mining operations, wastewater treatment and power plants, highway expansions, and landfills) by requiring the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to conduct a climate and environmental equity evaluation if they determine that issuing the permit may impact an underserved or an overburdened community.

The bill expands current State law in several important ways. First, it adds geographic impacts of climate change to the existing requirement for each State agency to review its program. Further, state agencies must identify and recommend changes to existing programs that do not currently address the geographic impacts of climate change or the opportunities to promote equitable wage and labor standards. Second, the bill broadens agency review of decisions to look at whether they will contribute to local deterioration of public health or increase pollution associated with health and environmental burdens for underserved and overburdened communities. Third, the bill requires MDE to provide residents the opportunity to receive text, phone, email, or regular mail notifications about any facility with a pending or final permit approval in or adjacent to the resident’s census tract.

SB743 is needed to address the impacts polluters have on the environment, health, labor, and well-being of Maryland's most vulnerable families; to give residents better access to information about the impacts that projects have on their environment and to be more engaged in the permitting process; and to address environmental racism and injustice that has left communities disproportionately affected by pollution. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on SB743.