



February 21, 2023

Committee | Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill | **SB743** - Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act

Position | Favorable

Hearing | February 23, 2023

Dear Chairman Feldman and Distinguished Committee Members,

I am Staci Hartwell, chair of the Environmental and Climate Justice Committee of the NAACP Maryland State Conference. We support SB743, which requires Maryland policymakers to evaluate the climate equity implications of proposed policy changes.

One of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee's primary goals is to advocate for increasing the livability of communities while also strengthening their resilience. SB743 would be a powerful tool for achieving exactly that. It will also serve as a cornerstone for implementing policy for the *Climate Solutions Now Act*.

This legislation is a meaningful step towards addressing one of the most insidious and entrenched forms of systemic racism. Across Maryland, BIPOC communities disproportionately suffer from pollutants and other environmental harm, poisoned by their own air, soil, and water. In Baltimore, a city that is 65% Black, as many as 130 residents per 100,000 die every year from the consequences of air pollution alone.¹ Despite this, the renewable-energy company, Energy Answers, is attempting to build a garbage incinerator that would emit 1000 pounds of lead and 250 pounds of mercury into the air of the Curtis Bay neighborhood, which remains largely segregated. This legislation will prevent us from "adding insult to injury."

Baltimore is not the only place that is harmed, however. Across Maryland, communities adjacent to industrial sites, such as Lothian in Anne Arundel County, are turned into "sacrifice zones" - places with severe and potentially irreversible pollution² and even greater, *negative* health impacts. In Lothian, which is disproportionately Black and poor, mining sites fill the air with diesel exhaust and dust while toxic cadmium leaches into the soil and water.

Currently, the predominantly Black community of Oxon Hill is being threatened by a proposed battery storage facility by PEPCO/Exelon. Facilities such as these are notoriously dangerous – they have a reputation of cascading explosions and deadly fires. This facility is proposed to be located thirty-five feet from the closest residential, single-family home and less than one

¹<https://grist.org/business-technology/baltimore-youth-of-color-are-still-fighting-plans-for-gigantic-garbage-incinerator/>

²https://www.bayjournal.com/news/policy/mining-waste-disposal-raise-environmental-justice-concerns-in-rural-maryland/article_b688b380-40c7-11ec-bc97-83d40bfd0e23.html;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/express/wp/2010/09/23/steve-lerner-book-sacrifice-zones/>

hundred yards from a much relied upon daycare center. The potential and unintended perils and impacts of this have gone ignored and there has been no consideration for property values, our inability to extinguish lithium fires, no emergency evacuation plan, no remedies for air and water contamination in case of fire, and so on. The recent horrific disaster in East Palestine should be evidence enough of what can happen if we do not consider the impacts on underserved and overburdened communities. More importantly, Black and Brown communities should not be further victimized by green/clean technologies.

This legislation will require governments within Maryland to consider the potential for undue harm caused by any policy change - including modifications to mining guidelines or approval for a new incinerator. In doing so, it will make BIPOC communities across the state more livable, their air safer to breathe, and their water safer to drink.

To help make the *Justice 40 Initiative* a reality and to achieve the goals outlined in the *Climate Solutions Now Act*, we request a favorable report on SB743.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Staci Hartwell, Chair

NAACP Maryland State Conference

Environmental and Climate Justice Committee

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