



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SJ0004 - Environmental Human Rights
Organization: Climate Justice Wing of the Maryland Legislative Coalition
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 8, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SJ0004. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on SJ0004.

This joint resolution to fully implement the Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973 (MEPA) serves to reaffirm the principle that every person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment. It further resolves that the State must rededicate itself, its agencies, and all concerned stakeholders to furthering the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, practices, and policies, as called for by MEPA.

MEPA includes the following broad and laudable policies:

- (1) the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the State's diverse environment is necessary for the maintenance of the public health and welfare and the continued viability of the State's economy and is a matter of the highest public priority;
- (2) all State agencies must conduct their affairs with an awareness that they are stewards of the air, land, water, living and historic resources, and that they have an obligation to protect the environment for the use and enjoyment of this and all future generations;
- (3) each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment, and each person has a responsibility to contribute to the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the environment;
- (4) it is the continuing policy of the State to cooperate with the federal government, other states, the District of Columbia, the political subdivisions of the State, and other concerned public and private organizations and individuals, in a manner calculated to protect, preserve, and enhance the environment;

- (5) the determination of an optimum balance between economic development and environmental quality requires the most thoughtful consideration of ecological, economic, developmental, recreational, historic, architectural, aesthetic, and other values;
- (6) beneficial environmental effects of proposed actions can be identified and measures devised to obtain these benefits if environmental evaluations are made a part of the decision making process of the State;
- (7) adverse environmental effects of proposed actions can be anticipated, minimized, and often eliminated if environmental evaluations are made as part of the decision making processes of the State;
- (8) environmental effects reports can facilitate the fullest practicable provision of timely public information, understanding, and participation in the decision making processes of the State;
- (9) the General Assembly has an obligation to the people of Maryland to review and evaluate proposed appropriations and other proposed legislation and the conduct of State agencies in carrying out the policy set forth in MEPA; and
- (10) the policies, rules, regulations, and public laws of the State must be interpreted and administered in accordance with the policies set forth in MEPA.

To achieve these policy goals, MEPA requires all State agencies to identify, develop, and adopt methods and procedures that will assure that (1) environmental amenities and values are given appropriate consideration in planning and decision making, along with economic and technical considerations; (2) studies are undertaken to develop and describe appropriate alternatives to present policies, programs, and procedures that involve significant adverse environmental effects or unresolved conflicts concerning uses of available resources; and (3) planning and decision making involving environmental effects are undertaken with the fullest practicable provision of timely public information and understanding and in coordination with public and private organizations and individuals within jurisdiction by law, special expertise, or recognized interest. MEPA further requires State agencies to prepare an environmental effects report in conjunction with each “proposed State action” significantly affecting the quality of the environment.

However, since the law was enacted, Maryland State agencies have failed to develop the required methods and procedures that would fully implement the intent of MEPA. On this 50th anniversary of MEPA, we support this resolution to recommit the State to fully implementing this landmark law for this and all future generations. We urge a **FAVORABLE** vote on SJ0004.