



**Hearing before the  
Education, Energy and Environment Committee  
of the Maryland General Assembly Senate  
March 8, 2023**

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)  
of the Jewish Youth Climate Movement Beth-El Chizuk Amuno Chapter on  
SJ0004 Environmental Human Rights**

The Jewish Youth Climate Movement, founded by the largest faith-based environmental organization Hazon in 2019, is a Gen Z-led movement dedicated to combating climate change and environmental injustice from a Jewish lens. Our goal is to make taking collective action towards climate justice a central, defining feature of what it means to be Jewish over the next decade, empowering the next generation of Jewish youth to be leaders in our fight to build a sustainable and equitable world for all. We are composed of over 50 chapters around the country and are sponsoring this legislation on behalf of the Beth El-Chizuk Amuno Baltimore Chapter of JYCM (JYCM BECA). (Please note that this does not necessarily reflect the official position of either Beth El Congregation or Chizuk Amuno Congregation.)

JYCM BECA wishes to express its enthusiastic support for passage of **SJ0004 Environmental Human Rights**, a joint resolution with the Maryland House of Delegates.

Environmentalism is a defining principle of what it means to be Jewish in 2023. We are guided by the values of Bal Tashchit (not wasting) and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) to propel our climate activism and advocate for this resolution.

Fifty years ago, Maryland lawmakers recognized that much harm had already been done, and thus legislators at that time committed the state and its agencies to a new guide for its environmental policies. The Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973 (MEPA) was a ground-breaking document. It was composed of two essential elements: 1) the assertion that “each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment,” and 2) a direction that all State agencies “identify, develop, and adopt methods and procedures” to implement that right.

The vision was that, going forward, a) environmental amenities and values would be given appropriate consideration in planning and decision-making along with economic and technical considerations; b) appropriate alternatives to existing policies, programs, procedures, and conflicts would be studied and considered; and c) that the public would be involved, utilizing “the fullest practicable provision of timely public information and understanding.”

These were worthy goals, and reflected the Jewish idea that people must save future generations from destruction (L'dor va Dor) and might have achieved great gains for Maryland, had the policy statement been crafted into commensurate laws and regulations.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maryland Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), JYCM BECA joins with other faith-based organizations to say it is time to fix that. SJ0004 Environmental Human Rights asks the Maryland General Assembly to reinvigorate MEPA by reaffirming its principles and using them to guide its deliberations. It calls on the Administration to re-dedicate itself to further the development and implementation of environmental laws, practices, and policies called for by MEPA, for the benefit of current and future generations.

A fully implemented Maryland Environmental Policy Act would create:

- Guidelines to help agencies craft and implement appropriate policies,
- Promote meaningful processes for public information and participation,
- Incorporate environmental justice definitions and processes in decision-making,
- Establish timely processes for keeping permits up to date.

Without a renewed commitment to MEPA's salience and enforcement in caring for our common home, there will continue to be no unified, coherent foundation upon which our State's agencies make their environmental policies, including ways to inform and engage the public, ways to assess environmental justice, and ways to ensure that laws are promulgated and implemented to reflect the central premise that every citizen "has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment."

We encourage the Maryland General Assembly, along with our new Governor Moore and his administration, to strengthen our environmental policies and laws, better implement those already on the books, and embed protections for public health and environmental justice in all our agencies and decision-making.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate joint resolution **SJ0004 Environmental Human Rights**.