



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SJ 0004:

Environmental Human Rights

****FAVORABLE****

March 8, 2023

TO: Senator Brian Feldman, Chair, Senator Cheryl Kagan and members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: The Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr; Diocese of Maryland; Co-Chair of the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network

In resolutely reaffirming the principles of the Maryland Environmental Policy Act and in celebrating its fiftieth year as law, we are also reminded, regrettably, that this particular human right has yet to become a reality in our state. Our state's biosystem – essential for our physical, economic and social health - continues to be subject to unnecessary harms. Communities of color and low income continue to suffer disproportionate concentrations of pollution and environmental degradation.

When passed in 1973, The Maryland Environmental Policy Act of 1973 was a groundbreaking document composed of two essential elements:

The assertion that “each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful environment”, and that all State agencies “identify, develop, and adopt methods and procedures” to implement that right, including ensuring that environmental amenities and values were given appropriate consideration in planning and decision making along with economic and technical considerations; that appropriate alternatives to present policies, programs, procedures and conflicts were studied and considered; and that the public was involved, utilizing “the fullest practicable provision of timely public information and understanding”

Those were lofty goals that could have achieved great gains for Maryland. Yet for the past fifty years, the State has largely ignored this mandate and failed to develop methods and procedures that would fully implement this right.

The time has come to change that.

The Maryland Environmental Policy Act - MEPA@50 Resolution asks the Maryland General Assembly to reinvigorate MEPA by reaffirming its principles and using them to guide its deliberations.



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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. We are in full support of this resolution.

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... and more

Without MEPA's enforcement, there is still 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, ways to ensure that laws are properly implemented.

We have an opportunity with the new Governor and this new 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.

The season of Lent calls the Church at this time to confess "our self-indulgent appetites and ways," "our waste and pollution of God's creation," and "our lack of concern for those who come after us" (Ash Wednesday Liturgy, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 268). We have an opportunity here. This is the appointed time for all God's children to work together for the common goal of renewing the earth as a hospitable abode for the flourishing of all life, not just human.

Our mother is dying. There may still be time to save her, but we must act swiftly and definitively to accomplish that goal.

We urge a favorable report.



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