

March 6, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve and the members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

Room 251 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

On behalf of The Anne Arundel County Collective, we write in strong favor of House Bill 851. The Anne Arundel County Collective is comprised of several leading organizations within the African American community. We work collaboratively to bring awareness to and advocate for underserved communities within Anne Arundel County, Maryland. We ask for a favorable report on House Bill 851 in an effort to eliminate lighting inequality across the state of Maryland. When speaking of environmental justice, the usual areas of concern are lead contamination, inadequate drinking water, poor air quality, and community toxins. What is missing from this list is light pollution or over-exposure to harmful lighting. With the heavy emphasis on addressing infrastructure and environmental injustices, we urge you to consider lighting inequalities and disparities in public spaces.

Light pollution is negatively affecting human health and has the potential to be an enormous public health concern in the future. This is especially true for low-income, minority communities. All persons, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or geographical domain, deserves quality lighting and benevolent darkness. For those living within these communities, that is not the case. Studies have found that these communities are plagued with forced artificial lighting and restricted access to darkness. It appears to be the rule, rather than the exception. These practices are rooted in infrastructural racism which dates back to historic redlining, but instead of discriminatory practices for denial of housing loans, it is seen in the denial of high-quality and sustainable lighting.

A study titled *Light Pollution Inequities in the Continental United States: A Distributive Environmental Justice Analysis*¹ found that those within low income, minority communities have far more exposure to ambient light at night than their non-minority counterparts. One reason for this, as highlighted by the study, is low-income minority communities are often categorized as criminal, which leads to over-lighting to support policing activity; even though there is uncertainty over its crime reducing abilities.

In a separate study, it was discovered that light pollution exposure levels for Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, and Pacific Islanders respectively were 106.7%, 99.4%, 98.5%, and 53.1% higher than Whites². Such a huge divide is not only inequitable and unjust, but it is a public health hazard. Light pollution is considered to be one of the fastest growing and most pervasive forms of environmental pollution; leading to an increased risk for diabetes, anxiety, cardiovascular diseases, and various other health concerns.

In 1994, an Executive Order was signed by President Bill Clinton to *“identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law.”*³

Considering the facts laid out in this written testimony, the Anne Arundel County Collective urges a favorable report on House Bill 851.

Sincerely,

The Anne Arundel County Collective

The Anne Arundel County Collective includes:

National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Anne Arundel County Chapter

NAACP, Anne Arundel Chapter

Arundel Bay Area Chapter, Jack and Jill of America, Inc.

North Arundel County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Rho Eta Zeta Chapter

Lambda Delta Sigma Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

Delta Pi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

References:

1 “Light Pollution Inequities in the Continental United States: A Distributive Environmental Justice Analysis” by Shawna M. Nadybala, Timothy W. Collins, and Sara E. Grineski. *Environmental Research*, Volume 189, October 2020.

2 Nadybal, S.M., Collins, T.W., & Grineski, S.E. (2020). Light pollution inequalities in the continental United States: A distributive environmental justice analysis. *Environmental Research*, 189, 109959. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2020.109959>

3 Exec. Order No. 12898, 1994

