Dear House Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am a resident of **D46. I am testifying in support of HB0840, the Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023.**

This bill will require the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to consider the demographics, health and current exposure to pollutants of local communities when issuing permits for high impact polluters such as incinerators, landfills, and other facilities subject to permits around air emissions, water discharges, and hazardous materials. Specifically, the bill requires MDE to conduct an environmental equity evaluation prior to issuing a permit if it is determined that the applicant facility will impact a community defined as "underserved" or "overburdened" by health risks related to pollution[1], and provide these communities with opportunities to opt into communications regarding the applicant facility. The environmental equity evaluation may include analysis of: demographic, public health and pollution data for the community; potential pollution impacts of the facility and methods for mitigating these impacts; relevant environmental compliance records; and potential health impacts in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health. Additionally, this bill expands the scope of current state agency reporting and planning in regard to climate change, requiring the Maryland Department of Labor to also consider how their programs and practices support businesses with equitable labor and wage standards.

Pollution is a racial justice issue. The Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023 is necessary because of a shameful legacy of institutional racism in Maryland and the U.S. These policies have led to communities of color being disproportionately exposed to contaminated air, water, and soils where they live and work through proximity to industrial activities and natural resource extraction, landfills and hazardous waste storage, traffic emissions from busy roadways, and untreated sewage discharges from aging infrastructure. Exposure to pollutants, as recognized by the Maryland statute referenced above, is linked to a wide variety of health issues including heart disease, stroke, low birth weight, some types of cancer, asthma, chronic bronchitis and other respiratory diseases.

Despite significant gains in air quality in the last 20 years, recent research continues to confirm the serious consequences of exposure to air pollutants, especially fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) and ambient ozone (O_3). Fine particulate matter is estimated to cause 100,000 premature deaths annually in the U.S.[2], and long-term ozone exposure has been directly linked to increases in emphysema and a decline in lung function.[3] Furthermore, when connecting particulate matter pollution in the U.S. to its major sources (e.g., consumption of energy, goods, and resources), it has been established that this pollution of consumption is disproportionately driven by the white population, and "disproportionately inhaled" by communities of color.[2] We cannot allow this to continue unchecked.

This bill is necessary, and long overdue. Low income communities and communities of color disproportionately shoulder the burden of pollution exposure in our state. Today, as we work to rebuild our economy, I am calling upon you to follow through on the responsibility you have for the wellbeing of the people of Maryland and act in support of more equitable environmental conditions, health outcomes, and wages. For these reasons, we urge you to vote **in support of the Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023 (HB0840).** Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
John Ford
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[1] https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=gen&section=1-701&enactments=false
[2] https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1818859116
[3] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2747669?guestAccessKey=cfba7399-ed6b-4ff3-abcd-260039916cd9