



HB840 – Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023

Testimony before

House Environment and Transportation Committee

March 8, 2023

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **support of HB840**, which would require the Department of the Environment to conduct certain evaluations before issuing certain environmental permits. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We appreciate the leadership of Delegate Boyce in sponsoring this important legislation.

Currently in the state of Maryland, there is no process to evaluate how a polluting industry's location and projects impact the state's workers, jobs, health, and property values. Studies have shown that these projects are often pushed onto overburdened communities, especially low-income and minority communities, without any discussion with the neighborhoods affected. This Act will work towards addressing the environmental injustice at the permitting level for projects that impact the land, air, and water.

The Act would achieve this by expanding reporting for several state agencies and an academic center to include climate change and environmental justice, require the Department of Labor to annually report on whether its decisions are supporting equitable wage and labor standards, and requiring a comprehensive evaluation of the environmental and societal impacts for environmental permits with a high Environmental Justice score in underserved and overburdened communities. These actions combined will make sure that minority and low-income areas are not continually saddled with unhealthy projects, while also ensuring that the workers in the state are being paid fairly and receiving comparable fringe benefits.

Finally, the Act would allow residents to opt-in to be notified of pending environmental permits in their area. This is important because knowing what might be coming will allow the people to get involved and resist if necessary.

For these reasons, we support HB840.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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