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SUPPORT: HB 840 - Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023

Chairman Barve, Chairman Wilson, and Members of the Committees:

Maryland LCV supports HB 840, the Climate Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023, and we thank Delegate Boyce for her committed leadership on this issue.

This bill takes steps to ensure resources are allocated and protections are in place for communities across our state who are overburdened by existing environmental pollution, or underserved because of structural inequities resulting in a dearth of opportunities in low-income communities, communities of color, and communities with limited English proficiency.

Through the actions put forth in HB 840, agency decisions can move into closer alignment with community needs, and add a layer of scrutiny for certain permits that the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) deems would have a high adverse impact on the surrounding community. The Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity Act of 2023 would:

1. Expand the publicly available climate change and environmental justice reporting requirements for eleven key state agencies, and one academic center;
2. Require the Department of Labor to annually report on whether its decisions are supporting equitable wage and labor standards;
3. Require a comprehensive evaluation of the environmental and societal impacts for environmental permits with a high Environmental Justice score in underserved and overburdened communities. This evaluation should include:
 - i. Demographic and health data, as well as any related vulnerabilities in the community;
 - ii. Climate-related impacts from the proposed project;
 - iii. Cumulative impacts of pollution in the community;
 - iv. Potential methods to minimize or mitigate potential adverse effects in the affected community;
4. Allow MDE to deny or amend permit applications based on this evaluation;
5. Require an “in-the-know system” where Maryland residents can opt-in to be notified about pending environmental permits in their area.

We recognize that the requirements in the bill may require additional staffing needs at MDE and the Department of Labor, and support the allocation of resources for the agency to fully implement and enforce environmental justice initiatives.

Maryland LCV supports policies that advance the tenets of environmental justice: fair treatment and meaningful involvement. This bill does both. We strongly urge a favorable report on this important bill.