



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB-0653 - Standing - Environmental and Natural Resources Protection Proceedings (Clean Water Justice Act of 2024)
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Rhonda Kranz
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 27, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for accepting our written testimony in support of SB0653. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing is a statewide coalition of over 30 grassroots and environmental advocacy organizations focused on climate justice and we urge you to vote favorably on SB0653.

This bill will provide individuals and organizations standing in environmental and natural resources protection proceedings, including proceedings arising under laws relating to water quality and water resources protection; authorizing persons that meet standing requirements to bring civil actions under certain circumstances; authorizing a court to grant relief, award costs, and impose civil penalties in environmental and natural resources protection proceedings. The bill will allow citizens and communities harmed by illegal water pollution to have an essential role in enforcing state law.

Maryland citizens have the right to clean water and healthy communities. The federal Clean Water Act offered communities protection by securing access to the courts to enforce pollution laws. However, the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Sackett vs. EPA*, removed most streams and wetlands from the Clean Water Act and left our communities with no legal rights to protect themselves. The Clean Water Justice Act will restore this essential right to Maryland citizens.

Although Maryland has laws and regulations that protect its waterways, communities have the eyes and ears to identify local water issues that are often missed by regulatory agencies. This had been proven by the work of Maryland's Water Pollution Watchdog program, which has been successful in identifying local pollution unnoticed by regulatory agencies. Regulators do not have the staff or ability to keep track of emerging signals of pollution such as color, odor, bubbles, muddiness, and floating materials.

These observations are reported to regulatory agencies and when action is taken, it shows how citizens and agencies can work together. When regulations have not been enforced, Maryland communities have used the citizen suit provision in the Clean Water Act and taken agencies to court. At this time, there is no recourse for citizens to enforce the state laws that protect their local waterways from as sewage, trash, industrial waste, toxic chemicals and other pollutants. The safety of our water has an impact on the health of our citizens and in their ability to enjoy the State's amazing natural resources. Marylanders deserve the right to play a role in enforcing laws that protect their waterways.

For the reasons given above, we urge a FAVORABLE vote for SB0653.

350MoCo
Adat Shalom Climate Action
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry
Chesapeake Earth Holders
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Climate Parents of Prince George's
Climate Reality Project
ClimateXChange – Rebuild Maryland Coalition
Coming Clean Network, Union of Concerned Scientists
DoTheMostGood Montgomery County
Echotopia
Elders Climate Action
Fix Maryland Rail
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
HoCoClimateAction
IndivisibleHoCoMD
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Mobilize Frederick
Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
Montgomery Countryside Alliance
Mountain Maryland Movement
Nuclear Information & Resource Service
Progressive Maryland
Safe & Healthy Playing Fields
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
The Climate Mobilization MoCo Chapter
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
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