**Committee:**       **Finance**
**Testimony:**       **Transportation and Climate Alignment Act (SB 681)**
**Position:**        **Support**
**Hearing Date:**    **February 28, 2024**

**Ernesto Villasenor, Jr., J.D**
**Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund**

On behalf of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund, we strongly support the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act (SB 681), which aim to address climate pollution and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in Maryland's transportation sector. This legislation holds tremendous potential to advance our state's goals for environmental sustainability and equitable access to transportation while aligning with the objectives set forth in Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

Our transportation sector remains the largest contributor to climate pollution in the state, and with Maryland having the second-worst average commuting time in the nation, addressing this issue is paramount. As we plan for the future of transportation in Maryland, it is imperative that our efforts align with the state's ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2031 and to curtail the total miles traveled by cars and trucks on our roads, known as Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). By doing so, we can protect our environment, alleviate traffic congestion, and enhance overall mobility for Marylanders.

The bill mandates that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and regional transportation planning agencies closely monitor and mitigate any increases in climate pollution and VMT resulting from highway expansion projects exceeding $10 million. This requirement represents a crucial step in ensuring that transportation infrastructure development prioritizes environmental stewardship and community well-being.

By emphasizing mitigation actions such as improving public transit, expanding bike infrastructure, promoting remote work options, and encouraging the proximity of jobs and amenities to residential areas, the bill not only fosters transportation equity but also contributes to reducing climate pollution. These measures align with Maryland's commitment to reducing per capita VMT by 20% by 2050, as outlined in the Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

Furthermore, the legislation is essential for Maryland to comply with the Federal Highway Administration's new greenhouse gas performance standard, which mandates the establishment of goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. This underscores

the importance of proactive measures to mitigate the environmental impact of transportation activities.

The significance of this bill extends beyond environmental concerns. It is also instrumental in building a transportation system that prioritizes equity, reliability, and accessibility for all Marylanders. By investing in effective multimodal transportation infrastructure that serves existing communities, we can reduce VMT and greenhouse gas emissions while enhancing mobility and connectivity.

A strong transportation system should serve as a catalyst for equitable access to jobs, housing, education, food, healthcare, and recreation, regardless of geographical location. It should empower individuals to navigate their daily lives with ease and efficiency, while also fostering sustainability and environmental responsibility. It is essential that we prioritize investments in transportation infrastructure that promote multimodal options, reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, and encourage sustainable modes of transportation such as public transit, biking, and walking.

As a supporter of sustainable transportation initiatives and environmental conservation efforts, I urge you to consider the importance of this bill in shaping Maryland's transportation future. By enacting this legislation, we can make significant strides towards achieving our climate goals, promoting social equity, and safeguarding the well-being of current and future generations.

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