

**Committees:** Senate Finance Committee  
**Testimony on** SB681 Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024  
**Organization:** Elders Climate Action Maryland  
**Submitting:** Leslie Wharton, Chapter Leader  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** February 29, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB 681. Elders Climate Action Maryland is our state chapter of [Elders Climate Action](#), a nationwide movement of elders striving for a future where our children, grandchildren, future generations, and all life can thrive. We urge you to vote favorably on HB836.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to our health. The health effects include more vector-borne diseases, more heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, injuries from wildfires and extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods, and mental health problems. These issues threaten the lives and health of all Maryland residents, particularly children and the elderly.

One thing that is less often recognized is the close tie between air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. 88% of Maryland residents live in areas that do not meet EPA air quality standards. Air pollution is a major contributor to absences from work and school, increased healthcare costs, and premature deaths. This can be seen clearly in the high rates of hospitalization for asthma in Maryland, especially in Baltimore. Research shows that decreases in air pollution lead to significant and rapid decreases in asthma hospitalizations. Improvements in health, especially in children and people living in overburdened communities, will be the first benefit we see from decreasing the use of fossil fuels.

Transportation is Maryland's largest source of climate pollution. SB 681, the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024, would mitigate the negative climate impact of future transportation projects and increases in vehicle miles traveled due to those projects. This is essential for meeting the goals set in the Climate Solutions Now Act.

Mitigation options proposed by the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024 include improving and expanding public transportation, creating bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and other smart growth strategies. Beyond the vital goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, these measures can make our air cleaner, provide opportunities for safer walking and biking, and increase equity across Maryland.

Processes similar to the one in this bill are being successfully implemented in Minnesota and Colorado. We would be wise to learn from their example.

We recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for SB681 in committee and passage by the House.