

MARYLAND TEACHER OF THE YEAR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB993:

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

According to the Climate Literacy Framework from the US Global Change Research Council, Climate Literacy is an understanding of your influence on climate and climate's influence on you and society. That is hitting the nail on the head.

As an educator in Maryland schools, I am thrilled to see Delegate Stein's bill, HB993, that will codify "Maryland Climate Education Week," annually on April 1-7th. Thanks to The Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) and educators statewide for advocating for it. This dedicated week of climate learning in K-12 schools, colleges and universities and communities signifies a pivotal investment in our children's future.

Climate change is not a far-off threat - our students are living its threatening realities now, as we experience a rise in extreme storms, flooding, heatwaves, allergy seasons and harmful insect infestations. Young people will continue dealing with the escalating impacts in the coming decades. Armed with climate education, our students can help curb greenhouse gas emissions that are the cause of the climate crisis, while adapting to the changing conditions.

Maryland Climate Education Week demonstrates that state leaders recognize the vital need to prepare students to solve this crisis. During the week, schools and organizations across Maryland will discuss issues surrounding the massive topic of climate change, not only in science classes, but in any and all classes. Climate change is a global crisis about which we can highlight its social, economic, and ethical implications. Lessons will empower students with the knowledge to reduce their carbon footprints, advocate for climate policies, pursue careers, and build community resilience.

When we support positive efforts such as HB993, we are growing a generation of informed citizens who can confront the climate crisis. Students gain critical thinking skills to evaluate solutions and unpack misinformation. They also develop empathy for the most vulnerable communities bearing the earliest brunt of droughts, sea level rise, and pollution.

I applaud Delegate Stein and the General Assembly members working with teachers and community groups to make Maryland Climate Education Week a reality. It signifies commitment to our children. With continued collaboration, our schools can spearhead sustainability efforts not only on their own buildings and grounds, as required by the Climate Solutions Now Act, but also in neighborhoods throughout Maryland.

It bears repeating: Climate literacy is about your influence on climate and climate's influence on you and society. We must equip our youth with climate competencies - their future depends on it. HB 993 is a positive step. Thank you for your consideration.

Mary Kary Connerton,

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Maryland's 2023-24 Teacher of the Year, Annapolis High School

Maryland and the spokeswoman for the 2024 Maryland Climate Education Week and Teach-In