



Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee
Maryland General Assembly
January 23, 2025

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home for
HB 128, the Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based upon, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation and respect for all life. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics. In the 2024 Legislative Session, 570 Maryland Catholics from 22 different Catholic parishes and religious communities across the State joined together through MCCH to support several key environmental bills under consideration by the General Assembly. MCCH is independent, though, and should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy positions of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

Because we are attuned both to the cry of a distressed Earth and the cry of the poor who suffer first and foremost from a warming planet, **MCCH would like to express our strong support for House Bill 128: Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025.**

In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ Pope Francis called for a comprehensive response to the threats from climate change, including especially “an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced (by) substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 26)

In his 2023 apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum*²—a follow-up to *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis sounds an even more urgent cry to do much more about reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. “I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of this apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, and forced migrations.” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 2)

Maryland has admirably risen to the challenges that have impelled these statements by Pope Francis through *Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction Plan*, which was released by the Department of the Environment in 2023. A key challenge in implementing this forward-looking plan, though, is finding the necessary revenue. This challenge has been made more acute by Maryland’s large structural budget deficit. As urgent as the need for climate action is, responding to this need is in competition for budget resources with other worthy public goals. This competition for limited resources will become even more dire in the coming year, as Federal funds for public needs such as education appear to be targeted for steep reductions by the incoming Administration. The solution is to find sources of new funding that can be dedicated to climate-related infrastructure upgrades, building upgrades, special programming, and energy investments—without resorting to mechanisms that impose additional costs directly on Maryland residents, and especially its poorest citizens.

In this regard, MCCCH believes that the Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025 should be enacted. The RENEW Act, based on the “polluters pay” premise that undergirds the Federal Superfund program, has **no consumer pass-through**. It holds the largest, most polluting fossil fuel companies strictly liable for the damage caused by the climate change impacts that all Marylanders, and especially Maryland’s most vulnerable communities, are experiencing. **Collecting it will not affect Marylanders’ pocketbooks.**

The benefits of being able to achieve the vision of *Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction Plan* through adequate funding are enormous. Dedicated climate and climate-related public health funding is essential if Maryland’s most vulnerable populations are to be protected from the chronic impacts of a changing climate. For example, the lowest-lying neighborhoods in Baltimore are disproportionately inhabited by low-income communities of color. These neighborhoods are barely above sea level, and are increasingly pummeled by heavy downpours resulting from the additional moisture in our warming atmosphere—resulting in local flooding, waterlogged soil, and backed-up sewage.

The RENEW Act will help raise the funding needed to implement *Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction Plan*—a plan for infrastructure projects that will help Maryland adapt to our warming planet—without exacerbating the state’s structural deficit problems.

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on House Bill 128.