

Sacoby M. Wilson, PhD, MS

Director, Center for Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health INpowering Communities (CEEJH INC)



Good afternoon Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee.

We are writing from the Center for Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health INpowering Communities (CEEJH INC) to express our strong support of HB 1406, which will provide important, targeted environmental health protections for the communities in Maryland most overburdened by pollution. A study found that regional air pollution from oil and gas production in the U.S. is responsible for 7,500 excess deaths, 410,000 asthma attacks, and 2,200 new cases of asthma each year.<sup>1</sup> These health effects due to oil and gas production creates annual health costs of \$77 billion. Nitrogen oxide, a common pollutant associated with burning natural gas, was the largest contributor to mortality and over 80% of asthma attacks. These health impacts were previously unaccounted for in health impact assessments. HB 1406 is a Public Service Commission (PSC) bill that will set rates, restructure the electric industry, promote EV charging, enforces consumer protection regulations, and provides consumer education. It will regulate utilities, transportation, fees, generating stations; and promote public safety, state economy, natural resources conservation, and environmental quality.

Energy burden disparities are pronounced across the state of Maryland.<sup>2</sup> People of color are more likely to be vulnerable to landlord policies, with just 54% owning homes in Maryland as compared with 77% of White Americans.<sup>3</sup> Maryland also ranks first in the nation in vacant home rates, with highest rates in Baltimore, the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland.<sup>4</sup> Maryland has not established the necessary “clean vehicle” policies to support Electric Vehicle (EV) deployment.<sup>5</sup> Specifically in the Western and Eastern Shore regions of Maryland, there are a lack of Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) charging stations.<sup>5</sup> Baltimore is a case of energy injustice due to the number of incinerators,<sup>6</sup> power plants,<sup>7</sup> and heavily trafficked roadways.<sup>8</sup> These have contributed to increased air pollution, which has been correlated with the urban heat island effect and overall excessive heat.<sup>9</sup> Between 2012 and 2018, 28% of Maryland’s heat-related deaths occurred in Baltimore,<sup>10</sup> whose population is predominantly Black,<sup>11</sup> demonstrating the differential burden of energy injustice on communities of color in the state of Maryland. By regulating public utilities and setting fair rates, HB 1406 ensures that underserved communities of color are not disproportionately burdened by rising energy costs. This bill protects vulnerable populations from predatory energy pricing, promoting affordable and accessible clean energy solutions. With the recent attacks on environmental justice at the federal level, it is now more important than ever for states, like Maryland, to take ownership of environmental protections and serve as a model for other states that similarly experience differential impacts.

<sup>1</sup> Buonocore, J. J., Reka, S., Yang, D., Chang, C., Roy, A., Thompson, T., ... & Arunachalam, S. (2023). Air pollution and health impacts of oil & gas production in the United States. *Environmental Research: Health*, 1(2), 021006.

<sup>2</sup> Makhijani, A., Mills, C., & Makhijani, A. (2015). (rep.). Energy Justice in Maryland’s Residential and Renewable Energy Sectors. Institute for Energy and Environmental Research . Retrieved March 30, 2022, from <https://ieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/RenMD-EnergyJustice-Report-Oct2015.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Krysan M. (2008). Does race matter in the search for housing? An exploratory study of search strategies, experiences, and locations. *Social science research*, 37(2), 581–603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2007.06.001>

<sup>4</sup> (2020). (rep.). Maryland Housing Needs Assessment & 10-Year Strategic Plan. Retrieved 2022, from <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Documents/Other%20Publications/Report.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> MDOT. (2021). Annual Report 2021. Maryland Department of Transportation. Retrieved from [https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/OPCP/ZEEVIC-2021Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/OPCP/ZEEVIC-2021Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Wheelabrator incinerator. Chesapeake Bay Foundation. (2021). Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.cbf.org/about-cbf/locations/maryland/issues/wheelabrator-incinerator.html#:~:text=The%20Wheelabrator%20incinerator%20in%20Baltimore,Anne%20Arundel%20and%20Howard%20counties> .

<sup>7</sup> Alamu, Samuel O., Ayodeji Wemida, Tiyoibistiya Tsegaye, and Gbekeloluwa Oguntimein. "Sustainability Assessment of Municipal Solid Waste in Baltimore USA." *Sustainability* 13, no. 4 (2021): 1915.

<sup>8</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). (2021). Environmental Justice Screening Tool (EPA EJSCREEN) Analysis of 1-Mile Buffer Surrounding BRESCO Incinerator. Accessed: <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>

<sup>9</sup> CEEJH. (2021, August 16). Heatwave Hell in Maryland. Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health (CEEJH). Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://ceejh.medium.com/heatwave-hell-in-maryland-fa33e7153c0a>

<sup>10</sup> Maryland, C. N. S. (2019, August 15). Red alert neighborhood heat inequality. CNS Maryland – Capital News Service. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://cnsmaryland.org/interactives/summer-2019/code-red/neighborhood-heat-inequality.html>

<sup>11</sup> Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. (2018). About BNIA-JFI. Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. Retrieved November 14, 2021, from [https://bniajfi.org/about\\_bnial/](https://bniajfi.org/about_bnial/).

With the advent of climate change leading to climate-induced natural disasters (i.e., wildfire smoke spanning the continent leading to elevated criteria air pollutant and black carbon concentrations), expanding EV charging infrastructure is a necessary step toward reducing vehicle emissions and improving air quality, particularly in overburdened urban areas where residents experience higher rates of asthma, urban heat island effects, and respiratory diseases due to transportation-related air pollution. A prime example is South Baltimore, where in addition to heavily congested roadways, residents face pollution from nearby coal fired power plants and terminal facilities, as well as increased utility costs threatening displacement.

As Maryland confronts an energy crisis, we can and must make sure we do not increase pollution on already-overburdened communities. HB 1406 is a necessary and timely bill to protect the most polluted communities in Maryland from more pollution. Please pass it in 2025!

Sincerely,

CEEJH INC