



HB128 - SUPPORT
Matthew Tejada
Natural Resources Defense Council
mtejada@nrdc.org

HB 128- Responding to Emergency Needs from Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025

Joint Meeting of Economic Matters and Environment and Transportation Committee

January 23, 2025

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, Members of the Economic Matters Committee, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (“NRDC”), I urge a favorable report on HB0128, the RENEW Act. This bill is ultimately about ensuring that the world’s largest producers of fossil fuels are held responsible for the harmful effects of climate change—hotter temperatures, longer and more severe heat waves, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels—that have and will continue to cost the state of Maryland billions of dollars in public health services and climate adaptation measures.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is an international, nonprofit environmental organization with more than three million members and online activists, including over 10,000 donor and advocacy members in Maryland. For five decades, NRDC has been committed to the preservation, protection, and defense of the environment, public health, and natural resources. And for over a decade, NRDC has helped states, municipalities, and the federal government adapt to the effects of climate change—including drought, flooding, wildfires, heatwaves, and other extreme weather. In response to a legal petition filed by NRDC in 2021, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is overhauling multiple aspects of the National Flood Insurance Program. Our work with coalitions also supported new flood disclosure policies that went into effect in New York, New Jersey and North Carolina in 2024 that ensure that both renters and homebuyers are aware of flood damages and risks.

Pollution from the oil and gas industries is the largest driver of climate change. While experienced globally, it is a problem with very local effects, especially on Maryland’s low-income communities and communities of color. Right now, extreme weather events are driving up costs for Marylanders and contributing to the state budget crisis, totaling nearly \$3 billion this year alone. With almost 3,200 miles of coastline, Maryland has lost more than 25,000 acres of

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forest and about 3,500 acres of farmland to tidal marsh since 1984.¹ According to the Center for Climate Integrity, Maryland will face \$27.4 billion in costs to build seawalls by 2040.² Also according to this organization, Maryland will face around \$800 million in school cooling costs by 2025, affecting almost 900,000 students.³ These costs will be borne by Maryland taxpayers, and are a direct result of climate change.

Meanwhile, oil, coal, and gas companies are enjoying windfall profits as consumers pay higher heating and transportation costs—Exxon-Mobil, for example, reported net income of \$26 billion for 2024 and Shell reported \$21.4 billion for 2023.

To help recoup the unprecedented costs associated with climate change adaptation, several states are turning to a long-standing and well-established environmental principle—polluter pays. Since the 1980s, the federal Superfund law has forced legacy polluters to pay for the clean-up of toxic wastes dumped over time, including during the decades when such dumping of toxic waste was not specifically illegal. It is a simple “strict liability” concept—if you made the mess, you pay for the clean-up and the consequences.

Versions of this bill have already passed in Vermont and New York. At least four other states have introduced such bills—in California, New Jersey, Minnesota, and Massachusetts. Indeed, U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen wrote the model for this bill as part of a similar federal campaign.

The RENEW Act is, at its core, a taxpayer relief bill. Passing the RENEW Act will provide dramatic relief to Maryland taxpayers by asking the biggest oil companies responsible for global warming to pay their fair share of the cost to recover from and prepare for climate extremes like wildfires, flooding, intense rain events, extreme heat, and the public health impacts associated with these types of events. It will help the state address our budget shortfall without making any Marylanders pay an additional cent in taxes or energy costs.

As Maryland struggles daily with the local effects of climate change and plans for an uncertain future as temperatures continue to rise, it must be permitted to seek compensation for these exorbitant costs. Please pass the RENEW Act to relieve taxpayers from rising costs and to protect Marylanders from worsening impacts of climate change. We urge a favorable report.

¹ Center for Climate Integrity, Maryland Climate Impacts and Costs 1 (2024), <https://climateintegrity.org/uploads/media/CCI-Maryland-ImpactsAndCosts-2024.pdf> (last visited January 21, 2025).

² *Id.* at 2.

³ *Id.* at 8.