

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Mariana Rosales, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Climate; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support SB 425 Coal Combustion By-Products - Fees, Coordinating Committee and Regulations

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 425, offered by Senator Jackson. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate.

SB 425 bill represents an essential step in strengthening Maryland's approach to regulating coal combustion by-products (CCBs), enhancing coordination on environmental oversight, and ensuring the long-term protection of our natural resources and public health.

Coal combustion by-products contain harmful pollutants such as arsenic, mercury, and heavy metals that can leach into groundwater, pollute waterways, and pose risks to public health and ecosystems. SB 425 seeks to address these concerns by updating the regulatory framework and providing necessary oversight to mitigate these risks. Specifically, the bill establishes the Statewide Coal Combustion By-Products Coordinating Committee, which will facilitate information sharing, monitoring, and discussions on remedial actions at CCB sites across Maryland. This committee's work is critical to ensuring a transparent and science-based approach to addressing the environmental and public health concerns associated with coal combustion waste.

Additionally, the bill strengthens the Maryland Department of the Environment's regulatory authority by requiring it to adopt updated regulations that align with federal guidelines on coal combustion residuals. These regulations will enhance monitoring, improve disposal and storage standards, and ensure that past and present disposal sites are managed responsibly. TNC strongly supports these provisions as they will help prevent future contamination and promote stronger accountability for managing coal combustion by-products. The bill's inclusion of a minimum fee for generators of coal combustion by-products ensures that there is a dedicated funding mechanism to support regulatory efforts and environmental oversight. It is an important step in making sure that those responsible for generating CCBs contribute to their safe management and remediation.

In conclusion, SB 425 brings a well-balanced approach to addressing the harmful effects of coal combustion by-products while improving interagency coordination and environmental oversight. TNC urges the committee to support this legislation as it aligns with Maryland's commitment to public health, environmental protection, and climate resilience.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 425.