

February 13, 2025

Support - SB 149 - Responding to Emergency Needs from Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025

Education, Energy, and The Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to support SB 149, The Responding to Emergency Needs from Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025. United by a shared commitment to the health and well-being of all Marylanders, Healthy Climate Maryland is a coalition of dedicated public health and medical professionals that seeks to address climate change and environmental challenges by focusing on their impacts on public health. We are working to educate, advocate, and build strong partnerships towards a healthier, more sustainable future for Maryland.

We support the RENEW Act's approach to generate much-needed funding for climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, assessing a fee on the largest fossil fuel companies for the damages they knowingly caused.

Health Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change impacts our health in a myriad of ways. Hotter, drier conditions create fuel for wildfires; hotter, wetter conditions create new habitats for mosquitoes and other bugs that carry illnesses; heat and air pollution create difficult conditions for people with respiratory illnesses. As we state in our [climate change overview factsheet](#), "**The main contributor to climate change is the burning of fossil fuels for energy, transportation, and industry.** [Burning fossil fuels increases health hazards](#) through climate instability and the pollution it generates. Pollutants like ozone and PM2.5 degrade air quality, contributing to a range of health problems."

In 2021, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) published a [report](#) that found that climate change and fossil fuel pollution result in \$820 billion in health costs annually. This number reflects costs seen through premature deaths, medical care for treatment of physical and mental health conditions, rehabilitation and home health care, prescription medications, lost wages and worker productivity, and downstream health costs (e.g. homelessness after a disaster). It is therefore fitting that the RENEW Act proposes a solution to fund climate adaptation and resiliency efforts paid by the polluters who caused the damages. This is a familiar approach to health professionals, as we have sought payment from tobacco companies from the damages they have caused.

Health Equity

While climate change creates risk for all Marylanders, [certain populations are disproportionately impacted due to unequal exposure and their limited ability to respond to climate risks](#). These include children, older adults, pregnant people, communities of color, low-wealth communities, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, and those living in climate-sensitive geographies, such as rural, coastal, and flood-prone areas. Some of these vulnerabilities are due to unequal social structures and disparate access to opportunity.

The RENEW Act directs at least 40% of funding generated to communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts and includes several provisions to invest in environmental justice and health equity.

Similar bills have been introduced in four other states and one has passed in Vermont. This bill aims to prioritize Marylanders, not its polluters, and invest in addressing the health impacts of climate change for a more resilient Maryland.

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