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February 25, 2025

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **FAVORABLE** – SB882 – Coal Transportation Fee and Fossil Fuel Mitigation Fund  
(Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act)

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), I submit for the record our testimony in support of Senate Bill 882. GHHI is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit organization headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. Our mission is to address the social determinants of health, opportunity and racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe and climate resilient homes.

GHHI is the nation's lead authority on the benefits of a whole-house approach that aligns, braids and coordinates energy efficiency, health and safety to create an integrated home repair and retrofit delivery model to improve health, economic and social outcomes in line with the state's climate goals. The GHHI model has been supported by the US Department of Energy (DOE) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as well as numerous states, cities and counties throughout the US. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI's work aims to eradicate the negative impact of historic disinvestment, the legacy of ill-conceived and unjust housing by creating holistically healthy housing for children, seniors and families in Maryland's low wealth communities. GHHI's work has been recognized through national best practice awards from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and HUD. In 2023, GHHI was awarded the Buildings Upgrade Prize award from the DOE in recognition of its proposed initiative to complete electrification of low-income households in East Baltimore through a community-driven, whole home initiative with health and safety, workforce, and efficiency benefits.

GHHI supports the passing of SB 882 because it will ensure that Maryland communities, especially those disproportionately affected by coal pollution, can breathe cleaner air, live in healthier homes, and access critical asthma treatment programs through a dedicated funding approach.

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Health and Respiratory Impacts of Coal Pollution

Baltimore serves as the nation's second-largest coal exporting port, following Norfolk, Virginia, with approximately 28% of U.S. coal exports passing through the city in 2023.<sup>1</sup> This high volume of coal transport has a direct and significant impact on local air quality, contributing to elevated levels of fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) — a pollutant well-documented for its harmful health effects. Even short-term exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub>, lasting as little as one hour, has been shown to trigger asthma attacks, cardiovascular events, and emergency hospital visits, particularly affecting children, seniors, and those with pre-existing health conditions.<sup>2</sup> Communities located along coal transport routes are disproportionately exposed to these pollutants, increasing their risk for respiratory diseases and exacerbating existing health disparities.

In the State Maryland we have some of the best health care systems in the country. However, in these same communities, we also see health disparities including that Maryland has over 500,000 children and adults who are diagnosed with asthma. Asthma is the number one reason children miss days from school. The societal costs directly correlate to 14.4 missed school days and 14.2 missed workdays in the US annually due to asthma episodes. In Maryland, the state spends \$42.1 million annually for asthma related hospitalizations. Direct medical costs of asthma in Maryland amount to \$100 million annually, with a significant portion attributed to emergency services and hospitalizations.<sup>3</sup>

This staggering financial burden reflects the broader public health impact of air pollution, particularly in communities disproportionately exposed to harmful pollutants from industrial activities, such as coal transportation. Nationally, asthma's annual direct healthcare cost reaches approximately \$50.1 billion, with an additional \$5.9 billion in indirect costs due to lost productivity. These figures underscore the urgent need to address pollution sources that exacerbate respiratory illnesses, especially in overburdened communities.

By taxing the coal that passes through the state, Maryland can offset the damage caused by this pollution and use the revenue to directly address the health and safety problems that come with coal transportation. This approach mirrors the state's existing model for oil transportation, where a fee on oil transport is used to fund efforts to clean up oil spills and protect communities from environmental harm. Just as the oil fee has held polluters accountable, a similar coal transport fee can fund asthma treatment programs, air quality monitoring, and community health initiatives — helping to safeguard public health while promoting environmental justice.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration. *Maryland State Profile and Energy Estimates*. U.S. Department of Energy, 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/state/print.php?sid=MD>. Accessed 18 Feb. 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Ostro, Bart, Nicholas Spada, and Heather Kuiper. "The Impact of Coal Trains on PM<sub>2.5</sub> in the San Francisco Bay Area." *Air Quality, Atmosphere & Health*, vol. 16, no. 1173–1183, 2023, doi:[10.1007/s11869-023-01333-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11869-023-01333-0).

<sup>3</sup> Norton, Ruth Ann, and Brendan Wade Brown. *Green & Healthy Homes Initiative: Improving Health, Economic, and Social Outcomes Through Integrated Housing Intervention*. Environmental Justice, vol. 7, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1–7. Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., doi:[10.1089/env.2014.0033](https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2014.0033).

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### Funding for Asthma Treatment and Community Health Programs

The bill designates 2% of the funds generated to support asthma treatment programs for communities impacted by coal dust, recognizing the critical need to address the health disparities caused by coal-related pollution. Investing in asthma mitigation is not only a necessary public health measure but also a proven strategy for improving broader community well-being. A prime example of this success is GHHI's whole house approach. Studies for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development have shown the benefits of GHHI's whole house approach in Baltimore as follows:

- 66% reduction in asthma related hospitalizations
- 62% increase in school attendance by addressing chronic absences due to asthma
- 88% increase in parental work attendance related directly to healthier children
- 30% reductions in asthma related ER visits
- 99% reductions in childhood lead poisoning
- Reductions in household injuries for children and trip and fall injuries for seniors
- Increased mobility and accessibility in the home for older adults who are able to Age in Place in the homes and communities where they choose to live

### Economic and Energy Equity Considerations

A February 2023 report from PSE Energy revealed that approximately 400,000 Marylanders experience an energy burden exceeding 6%, the threshold researchers use to define a high energy burden.<sup>4</sup> This disproportionately affects low-income households, forcing many families to make difficult choices between paying energy bills and meeting other essential needs. Rising utility costs, particularly due to the escalating 43% increase in BGE gas delivery rates since 2020, place additional strain on these vulnerable households, often leaving them trapped in an energy system that is both costly and environmentally damaging.

This fund dedicates up to 23% of its revenue to support home energy efficiency and electrification initiatives. This targeted investment ensures that communities most impacted by coal dust and fossil fuel pollution, particularly overburdened and underserved neighborhoods, can live in healthier, more energy efficient, and more affordable homes. By establishing a dedicated funding stream, the bill empowers households to transition away from outdated fossil fuel systems and invest in high-efficiency electric technologies like heat pumps and induction stoves, which reduce energy consumption while eliminating harmful air pollutants.

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<sup>4</sup> Arjun Makhijani, et al, Energy Affordability in Maryland: Integrating Public Health, Equity and Climate, Executive Summary (Feb. 2023), available at [https://www.psehealthyenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Energy-Affordability-in-Maryland-2023\\_-Final-Report-1.pdf](https://www.psehealthyenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Energy-Affordability-in-Maryland-2023_-Final-Report-1.pdf).

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### Conclusion

The Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act (SB 882) offers an equitable approach to addressing the long-standing health, environmental, and economic challenges posed by coal transportation in Maryland. By imposing a modest fee on coal transport, the state can finally hold polluters accountable while generating essential revenue to fund asthma treatment programs, energy efficiency upgrades, and community health initiatives—all of which directly benefit those most affected by coal pollution. This bill not only tackles the immediate public health crisis caused by coal dust and fossil fuel emissions but also invests in long-term solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and advance Maryland's ambitious climate goals. We urge the committee to support this critical legislation and take a decisive step toward creating a healthier, more equitable Maryland for all.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Ruth Ann Norton  
President and CEO