



**Testimony of Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi
In Support of SB882 – Coal Transportation Fee and Fossil Fuel Mitigation Fund
Before the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment**

February 27, 2025 at 1 PM

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB882, the Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act.

My name is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi. I serve as a Maryland Climate Commissioner and was the longtime CEO of a Maryland-based disability organization. I live in Annapolis, where our neighborhood floods so often that we can no longer obtain flood insurance. Meanwhile, more than 600,000 Marylanders with disabilities and chronic health conditions are at disproportionate risk from pollution and extreme weather.

As a child, I was taught: if you break it, you bought it.

Today, as we face mounting climate costs and a major budget crisis, we should not put our financial shortfalls on the backs of people with disabilities and other vulnerable people when we have not yet done our best to make polluters pay.

The impacts of coal transportation and pollution are felt most acutely by our most vulnerable residents. Communities already struggling with chronic health issues, particularly in Baltimore City and Western Maryland, bear the brunt of these environmental hazards. Children with asthma, seniors with respiratory illnesses, and people with disabilities are at a heightened risk due to coal dust exposure and the broader climate-related consequences.

This legislation is about fairness. It ensures that those who contribute most to pollution take responsibility for the harm they cause. Marylanders should not have to choose between covering essential public health services and funding climate mitigation efforts—especially when a solution exists that shifts the burden to the industries responsible for environmental degradation.

I invite you to read my oped in Maryland Matters below and urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB882 to protect our communities, improve public health, and ensure that those responsible for pollution contribute to the cost of fixing it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



<https://marylandmatters.org/2025/01/27/trumps-climate-orders-and-marylands-budget-crisis-demand-bold-action-now/>

Trump’s climate orders and Maryland’s budget crisis demand bold action now

President Donald “Drill Baby Drill” Trump’s new executive orders doubling down on fossil fuels and slashing clean energy mandates have sent a dangerous message: America is moving backward in the fight to protect the people and planet we love.

But here in Maryland, we don’t have to follow his lead. Instead, we can seize this moment to double down on progress and accountability, ensuring our state remains resilient in the face of the growing climate crisis. Given our budget crisis, we need to do it in a way that is fair, cost effective and will ensure our economy can thrive.

For Maryland, a state uniquely vulnerable to climate change impacts like rising seas, flooding and extreme heat, the stakes couldn’t be higher. We cannot rely on Washington to safeguard our future. Maryland must act decisively to secure its climate resilience and economic stability — and we can start by making polluters pay for their lies and the damage they’ve caused.

Maryland’s “Goldilocks” advantage is at risk

Maryland is a “Goldilocks State” — not too hot, not too cold, with a temperate climate that fosters economic growth and a high quality of life. We have the kind of inclusive values and excellent institutions of higher education and science that can make us attractive to people looking to relocate from other states. But the accelerating climate crisis is putting that balance at risk. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, threatening lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure.

The costs are staggering. In Baltimore and St. Mary’s County, millions are being spent to upgrade stormwater systems as rainfall intensifies. Annapolis has committed \$84 million to protect against rising tides. Statewide, Maryland will need billions more to shield our communities and transition to clean energy. Meantime, we are facing a budget crisis.

So far, however, Maryland’s budget is looking like it will rely on cuts to services and increases in fees and taxes to some Marylanders alone — leaving money on the table that morally should be ours.

We need measures that will hold corporate polluters accountable while delivering resources Maryland needs to combat climate change effectively. Without such forward-thinking policies, taxpayers will bear the brunt of lost services and mounting expenses, while fossil fuel companies rake in record profits.

The solution: three bills to make polluters pay

Maryland has a chance to lead where Washington is failing. Three pivotal bills could shift the financial burden of the climate crisis from taxpayers to the corporations that created it:

1. **The RENEW Act (HB128):** This bill establishes a fund for climate resilience projects, funded by fossil fuel companies. Similar bills have passed in Vermont and New York. Here at home, it could yield \$9 billion to finance critical infrastructure improvements and clean energy initiatives.
2. **Climate Lawsuit Authority (HB340):** This legislation enables Maryland to hold fossil fuel companies accountable in court for their role in causing climate damage. Similar lawsuits have already achieved significant settlements in other states, redirecting billions of dollars toward climate solutions.
3. **Coal Fee Legislation:** Speaker Pro Tem Dana Stein's upcoming bill will place a fee on coal transportation in Maryland, directing approximately \$300 million a year toward renewable energy projects and public health programs in communities affected by coal pollution.

Supercharging Maryland's economy

Fossil fuel companies claim that holding them accountable will hurt the economy, but the opposite is true. By investing in clean energy, climate resilience and public health, Maryland can create thousands of good-paying jobs in industries of the future. These investments will reduce energy costs, improve air quality and attract businesses and residents who value a sustainable, forward-thinking state.

Moreover, making polluters — not taxpayers — pay for the damages they caused will ease the financial burden on Maryland families. Rather than watching their tax dollars go to emergency repairs and cleanup, Marylanders can look forward to a future where corporate accountability funds prevention and innovation. It worked with tobacco and opioids, and should be done with fossil fuel companies as well.

Maryland has already made significant strides toward combating climate change, achieving a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions since 2006. But we can't rest on our laurels. Trump's executive orders remind us that federal leadership cannot be counted on to protect our communities. The responsibility lies with us to secure a livable future.

By passing the RENEW Act, HB340 and the coal fee legislation, Maryland can set a national example of climate leadership and economic fairness. These bills are not just about holding polluters accountable — they're about protecting the places we call home, the people we love and the opportunities we want to preserve for future generations.

It's time to act boldly. Let's make polluters pay — and ensure Maryland remains a beacon of resilience and progress in an increasingly uncertain world.

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi is co-founder of the Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund, which is a financial supporter of Maryland Matters. She serves on the Maryland Climate Commission and multiple nonprofit advisory boards. Contact: JLM@LaszloStrategies.com <https://mizrahienterprises.com/charitable>