



Committee: Environment and Transportation; Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB1088 – Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 11, 2025

Submitted on behalf of Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR). Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR) is a statewide evidence-based organization of over 900 physicians and other health professionals and supporters that addresses existential public health threats: nuclear weapons, the climate crisis, and the issues of pollution and toxic effects on health, as seen through the intersectional lens of environmental, racial and social justice.

CPSR strongly supports HB1088, which aims to establish a \$13 per ton fee on coal transported through Maryland, ensuring that coal-related pollution is not treated as an externalized cost disproportionately shouldered by our local communities. The bill also proposes creating a dedicated Fossil Fuel Mitigation Fund to address the harms of coal pollution, as it will direct revenue towards asthma treatment programs for residents impacted by coal dust and other climate initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote mass transit.

Background. For nearly 150 years, the coal transport terminal in Curtis Bay has exposed generations of local residents to coal dust.¹ Despite ongoing denial from CSX with claims that the black soot could be diesel residue or soil, a recent community-led report in partnership with Johns Hopkins researchers officially confirmed the presence of coal dust in South Baltimore.² This important finding validates the enduring concerns of residents who have long reported the frequent dark plumes of dust rising over their neighborhoods and infiltrating their homes and they suspect their lungs, forcing some to leave their windows closed indefinitely.³ The overwhelming danger of coal transport further became undeniable in 2021 when a dangerous coal explosion rocked the community, one that has already experienced a myriad of compounding harms, including exposure to known carcinogens from the largest medical waste incinerator in the country.²

It has become abundantly clear that the coal-related pollution from such terminals is not just an isolated issue, but part of a broader pattern of environmental harm in an area once ranked among the country's most polluted zip codes from air pollution – and worst among the state.³ The port

¹ <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/climate-environment/curtis-bay-residents-fight-csx-coal-traveling-through-port-of-baltimore-15T5STZ3MJGUHJFN7TMOFQVLVU/>

² <https://magazine.publichealth.jhu.edu/2024/community-vs-coal-reclaiming-health-curtis-bay>

³ <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/health/curtis-bay-south-baltimore-air-pollution-coal-incineration-public-health-impacts/>

of Baltimore continues to be the second largest coal exporter in the United States, and CSX is one of two Baltimore coal terminals that exported nearly 30 million metric tons of coal in 2023 alone and polluted the community while avoiding any sense of accountability.⁴

Public Health and Environmental Concerns. Why is coal dust so harmful? Coal dust contains particulate matter (PM), and the smallest particles of which, known as PM2.5, are the most worrisome. The presence of coal terminals significantly increases the ambient concentrations of such pollutants.⁵ Small enough to enter the lungs and bloodstream, PM2.5 is associated with heart disease, lung cancer, and numerous respiratory conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).⁶ The effects are deadly, as PM2.5 remains one of the world's leading causes of air pollution attributable deaths.⁶

Similarly, the health consequences seen in the community statistical area that includes Brooklyn, Curtis Bay and Hawkins Point – the southernmost part of South Baltimore – are profound. Compared to the rest of the country, these communities have asthma-related hospitalization rates that are three times higher.³ Compared to the rest of the city, these communities have an average lifespan that is around four years less (69.7 years versus 73.7 years), a disparity that expands to nearly eight years when compared to the surrounding Baltimore County.^{7,8} Furthermore, age-adjusted mortality rates due to heart disease, lung cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease and even all cancers were higher when compared to the Baltimore City.⁹ These devastating health harms overwhelmingly burden this part of South Baltimore that already experience limited healthcare access, lower median household income, and higher family poverty rates.⁸

Environmental factors further exacerbate these health impacts, with only 19.8% green space coverage compared to 33.1% citywide, and over 80% of the land there zoned for industrial use.⁸ Curtis Bay communities, in particular, have experienced multiple industrial incidents causing environmental harm beyond coal pollution, such as a fire from the Petroleum Management and a chlorosulfonic acid leak from Solvay Industries.³ By funding targeted asthma treatment programs and pollution mitigation efforts, this bill is a crucial opportunity to begin addressing these cumulative health and environmental burdens that have long demanded accountability.

Need for Action. While Maryland has made progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including setting a state-wide goal for zero emissions by 2045, current funding for greenhouse gas pollution mitigation is insufficient to address the full scope of the challenge. By enforcing a coal transportation fee, this bill is a critical step towards ensuring those who profit from fossil fuel use contribute fairly to the costs of mitigating its health and environmental effects, so that the financial responsibility is not unfairly shouldered by South Baltimore residents. Furthermore, this bill sets an important precedent that polluting industries cannot simply externalize their costs onto communities and turn a blind eye to the harms of their pollution. The legislation productively addresses the need for sustainable investment in community protection and climate resilience, particularly as extreme climate events become more frequent.

⁴ <https://engineering.jhu.edu/news/study-confirms-coal-dust-presence-in-baltimores-curtis-bay-raising-health-concerns/>

⁵ <https://ucdavis.app.box.com/s/sh55sgeix0r39k07zfsai1tcamux8qpw>

⁶ <https://www.stateofglobalair.org/health/pm>

⁷ <https://marylandmatters.org/2024/09/19/cdc-maryland-saw-slight-increase-in-life-expectancy-in-2021-in-depths-of-pandemic/>

⁸ [https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/NHP 2017 - 04 Brooklyn-Curtis Bay-Hawkins Point \(rev 6-9-17\).pdf](https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/NHP%202017%20-%2004%20Brooklyn-Curtis%20Bay-Hawkins%20Point%20(rev%206-9-17).pdf)

⁹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/38099060/>

As a public health graduate student in Baltimore and future physician, I am deeply concerned about my surrounding communities that have long experienced unchecked pollution from coal dust and well-documented health risks associated with this deadly exposure. **Therefore, representing Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility, we strongly urge you to support the Coal Dust Cleanup and Asthma Remediation Act**, as the bill takes critical action to mitigate longstanding harms, invest in community health, and enforce greater accountability from polluting industries.

Clean air should not be a privilege but a fundamental human right, and our communities deserve meaningful action to protect it.

Alison Chang
Medical Student and MPH Student
achang85@jh.edu

Affiliations:

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine