

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1058
By Dr. Sandya Venugopal, MD
Director of Policy, Clean Air Baltimore Coalition
February 26, 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee,

My name is Sandya Venugopal, and I am a physician-scientist and public health policy expert living in Baltimore City. I am also the Policy Director for Clean Air Baltimore Coalition. I am writing to express my unequivocal support for House Bill 1058, which seeks to clarify state law regarding the powers of local governments to adopt more protective air or waste laws.

As a physician, I have witnessed firsthand the adverse health effects that poor air quality and environmental pollution have on my patients. Residents of Baltimore City, particularly those in underserved communities, are disproportionately affected by respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and other pollution-related illnesses. These health disparities are exacerbated by the proximity of many of these communities to industrial facilities and heavy traffic areas.

House Bill 1058 represents a critical step towards mitigating the environmental health hazards that plague our city and state. By empowering local jurisdictions to establish more stringent emission and air quality standards, this bill provides the necessary tools to address the unique environmental challenges faced by different communities. It also underscores the importance of local autonomy in safeguarding public health, as each region has its own specific environmental needs and vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, the bill's requirement for the Department of the Environment to publish pertinent information online enhances transparency and public access to vital data. This fosters greater community engagement and accountability, ensuring that residents are informed and involved in the decision-making processes that directly impact their health and well-being.

In addition to improving air quality, House Bill 1058 also addresses the issue of solid waste management. The accumulation of waste in our urban areas poses significant health risks, including the spread of infectious diseases and contamination of water sources. By enabling local authorities to implement robust waste management policies and better regulate waste management facilities, this bill supports efforts to create cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable communities.

In conclusion, House Bill 1058 is an essential piece of legislation that prioritizes the health and well-being of Maryland's residents. As a physician and public health policy expert, I strongly urge the members of this committee to support this bill and take decisive action to protect our environment and public health.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandya Venugopal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Sandya Venugopal, MD
Director of Policy, Clean Air Baltimore Coalition.