

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

TO: Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Humna Sharif, The Nature Conservancy, Climate Adaptation Manager; Mariana Rosales, The Nature Conservancy, Climate Director

POSITION: Support HB 340, Climate Change - Attorney General Actions, Climate Change Restitution Fund, and Climate Change Restitution Fund Advisory Council

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 340, Climate Change - Attorney General Actions, Climate Change Restitution Fund, and Climate Change Restitution Fund Advisory Council. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate.

HB 340 is forward looking legislation that would help Maryland achieve its climate goals. This bill would create a Climate Change Restitution Fund and would give the Maryland Attorney General the authority to investigate, prosecute, or defend any suit or action that holds entities accountable for tortious or unlawful conduct that has contributed to climate change. The Climate Change Restitution Fund would help our state implement climate change mitigation and adaptation programs. The distribution of the funds will be decided by The Climate Change Restitution Advisory Council, which will consist of members of the General Assembly, State Secretaries, and representatives from Maryland stakeholder organizations. This collective represents a wide range of interests relating to climate change and will allow for a full discussion and decision on where to allocate funding.

Maryland has already passed some of the [most ambitious climate laws](#) in the country and has been a national leader in setting mitigation and resilience goals that would protect the lives and livelihoods of Marylanders and our irreplaceable natural heritage. The Moore-Miller administration has set a strong foundation for a [whole of government approach](#) to tackle climate change emissions in the state - but there is more work to be done to realize the vision of Governor Moore's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan. By holding the entities responsible for climate change accountable, the cost of mitigating climate change's impacts will not fall on Maryland resident's and taxpayers alone. Leadership from Maryland's state legislature is more important than ever to create the funding sources needed to tackle climate change head-on. HB 340 is a bill that will help the state bring in much needed revenue for the benefit of our communities and ecosystems.

The [negative impacts of climate change](#) are already disrupting the lives and livelihoods of the state's residents, local economies, and are threatening multiple iconic species which depend on Maryland's ecosystems. Nowhere are these impacts more acute than along our state's more than 7000 [miles of coastline](#) and low-lying land. In the last half century, sea level in Maryland has [risen by a foot](#), twice the rate of the global average. By 2050, the expected sea level rise in the state will likely surpass two-feet (as measured from a 2000 baseline). Coastal flooding due to sea level rise and extreme weather is only one aspect of the overall harm being caused by climate change. We are highlighting risks to coastal communities because more than two-thirds of Maryland's residents live in a coastal county or city and will need support from the state to implement climate positive and resilience enhancing practices.

What Maryland is experiencing is also being felt at a global and national level, with 2024 being a record-breaking year for rising land and water temperature, marked by [27 separate billion dollar disasters](#) that displaced families, claimed lives, and shuttered businesses across the US. These disasters have cost Americans over [\\$182 billion](#) in damages in 2024 alone. NOAA's latest [State of the Climate Report](#) makes it clear: we must do more to advance climate positive policies and help coastal environments and communities strengthen their resilience. As our state considers ways to reduce climate pollution, we must also pay attention to the locked-in impacts of climate change. We need to increase the state's investment in climate resilience and adaptation measures. In the absence of bold, ambitious action, climate change impacts will continue to worsen for Maryland's communities and important landscapes.

HB 340 follows the path set by similar legislation introduced in states like [Massachusetts](#), [New York](#), and [Vermont](#). TNC is grateful for the leadership of Delegates Ruth, Terrasa, Allen, Bofo, Charkoudian, Embry, Feldmark, Foley, Forbes, Guzzone, Lehman, McCaskill, Palakovich Carr, Pasteur, Smith, Stewart, and Wu in introducing this legislation. TNC looks forward to continuing to work on climate and resilience with decision-makers in the state. **Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 340.**