

SHEILA RUTH
Legislative District 44B
Baltimore County

Environment and Transportation
Committee



Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 326
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3802 · 301-858-3802
800-492-7122 Ext. 3802
Sheila.Ruth@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0340
(CLIMATE CHANGE - ATTORNEY GENERAL ACTIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE RESTITUTION FUND,
AND CLIMATE CHANGE RESTITUTION FUND ADVISORY COUNCIL)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 11, 2025

Climate change is already at a crisis point and science is predicting it will only worsen with time. Communities are already dealing with its escalating impacts, including rising sea levels, heat-related illnesses and death, agricultural losses, declining plant health, marine/aquatic life disruptions, and more frequent and intense storms leading to flooding and infrastructure damage. Wildfires are also on the rise, threatening native habitats. These challenges come at not only a high human cost but a high fiscal cost as well, placing financial and environmental burdens on Maryland residents, businesses, and our state and local governments.

Since 1968, the coal, oil, and gas industry realized their devastating impacts on the planet – and did nothing about it. Their own scientists warned that global warming would be “barely noticeable” in 2005, but by 2060 would be “catastrophic.” However, they hid this information from the public, prioritizing profit over the health of the public and our planet. If Big Oil had shared this information with the public and began transitioning to clean air initiatives, taxpayers would not be paying the consequences of their lies today.

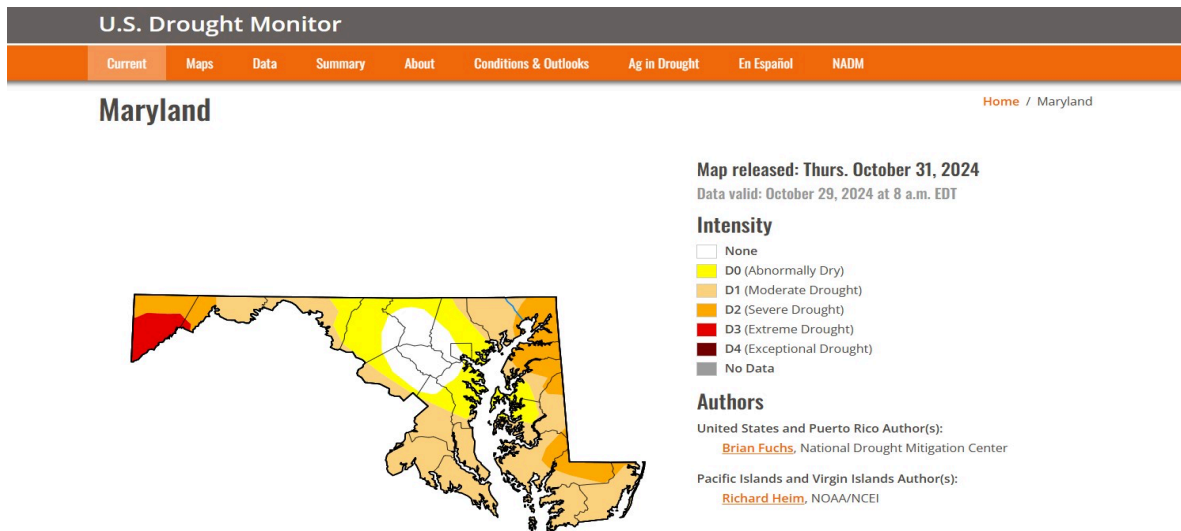
Maryland taxpayers should not have to bear the burden of paying for these costs, which will only increase as the global temperature rises. The polluters should be held responsible for their own actions and pay their fair share so that taxpayers like you and me do not.

Maryland’s Attorney General must have the power to hold these companies accountable, as has been authorized previously with tobacco and opioids. HB0340 would authorize the Attorney General to investigate, commence, and prosecute or defend a civil or criminal suit against any oil, coal, or gas corporation with a market capitalization greater than \$1 billion whose unlawful conduct contributed to climate change, and to hire outside counsel if needed. These limits are to protect smaller companies that did not engage in those aforementioned mass scale fraudulent and deceptive actions.

HB0340 also proposes the creation of a Climate Restitution Fund and a Climate Advisory Council, both of which are essential steps toward addressing the impacts of climate change in Maryland. The Climate

Restitution Fund would provide funding for programs to mitigate, prevent, and repair the harm climate change has caused to our communities.

Over the past century, temperatures in Maryland have risen about 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit. This upward trend has had unprecedented impacts on Maryland's environment. An increase in frequency and intensity of precipitation events elevates the risks of flooding and related damages. Sea level rise will affect our state, with it projected to rise in Maryland by four feet by the year 2100.



In 2024 alone, Maryland experienced an above-average number of wildfires as a result of dry and windy conditions. A total of 24 wildfires burned more than 75 acres in Washington, Frederick, Montgomery, Anne Arundel, and Worcester Counties. These events demonstrate the growing risks associated with climate change in an area that used to be at lower risk of wildfires.

The creation of a Climate Restitution Fund will help mitigate the damage these hazards cause by financing programs that repair damaged infrastructure and address economic losses, all while building climate resilience - particularly for Maryland's most vulnerable communities.

To guide these efforts, the bill also proposes a Climate Change Restitution Fund Advisory Council within the Department of Emergency Management, which would be composed of experts and representatives from various committees, that would identify the consequences of climate change in Maryland and provide actionable recommendations.

This would be a huge step towards protecting Maryland's future by developing community resilience, protecting our environment, and ensuring equal recovery for those negatively impacted by climate change. This bill would also ultimately hold bad actors accountable for their unlawful actions and the damage caused as a result. I urge a favorable report on HB0340.