



HB 1360 - SUPPORT

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HB 1360

Maryland Public Ethics Law - Regulated Lobbyists Reporting Requirements

Government, Labor, and Elections
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Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee:

The Climate Communications Coalition is a non-profit Maryland-based grassroots climate and environmental justice organization, a member of the Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition and of the Maryland Climate Justice Wing, among others. The Climate Communications Coalition strongly supports HB 1360.

Much of Maryland's climate inaction, as well as current reversals on climate action, are the result of constant lobbying by fossil fuel interests, only some of which are being properly disclosed. Lobbyists have derailed common sense policy and have reversed much needed action to the detriment of Marylanders, our environment, and our natural resources which may not be able to recover. Weak lobbying disclosure undermines climate progress and misleads the public.

As an example: A couple of weeks ago, a report from the University of Maryland's Center for Global Sustainability reported that Maryland will reduce its emissions by only 42% by 2031 - over 2006 levels-, not by 60% as was the initial track. This presents an enormous setback to Marylanders who are already suffering dramatic effects on their health and daily routine from climate change, not to mention associated electricity costs. We know that fossil fuel and big data lobbies have caused this delay, but, since Maryland's fossil fuel lobbyists only complied with disclosure requirements fifty percent (50%) of the time in 2025, how can we address this?

In return for this lobbying, over the last months, we have seen leadership:

- Veto important bills such as the RENEW Act (HB0128/SB0149) and the Data Center impact study bill (HB270/ SB0116), among others;
- Sign the Critical Infrastructure Streamlining Act of 2024 (HB0579 /SB0474) allowing the biggest polluters, namely Data Centers, to bypass the Public Service Commission's Certification of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) despite being expected to pollute well over 1,000 times more than a generating station (i.e. at 2.4 GW from the Catellus hyperscale campus, in Frederick. Usually 2MW would have prompted a CPCN);
- Permit hundreds of diesel backup generators to spew class-one carcinogens (W.H.O.) into neighboring communities and the environment with that same bill; and

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- Pass cost overruns for nuclear generation -or- costs for gas power expansion plans, on to already overburdened rate payers (HB 1532 and HB 1561), while simultaneously requiring that any added clean energy from solar not affect rates.

How is this possible in a State that purports climate and environmental justice leadership?

It's been over two decades since Maryland lobbying reforms were passed. At the time, lobbying for and against the same bill was banned. Today, however, Maryland only gets a C rating in lobbyist disclosures by FMinus.org because only half of lobbyists for fossil fuel and waste-to-energy projects, such as incinerators, file the required reports on bill numbers, and nobody files their position. This shows a lack of commitment and accountability by these lobbyists and reflects poorly on our elected legislative officials.

Case in point, the American Petroleum Institute's lobbyists disclosed not one single bill in 2024, yet we know they have an inordinate influence over energy policy. In 2025, after a long decade of effort, we finally removed waste incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standard ("RPS"). We accomplished this despite lobbyists who simultaneously represented the National Waste Recycling Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, and - confusingly and incorrectly- stated that air pollution was a "preventable risk factor." Regulating and enforcing lobbyists' reporting with HB 1360 would eliminate this type of dissembling. Incredibly, there is another bill in the legislature now (HB 1572) which would put waste incineration back into the RPS, while the two other highly polluting sources remain in the RPS, namely woody biomass for energy and biogas. Woody biomass for energy pollutes more than coal per unit of energy produced -and- biogas (methane) in addition to polluting, creates anoxic zones and algal blooms in our waters. Both have terrible health effects on surrounding communities. However, the energy industry (including API), the forest product industry, and the poultry industry lobbies, have effectively highjacked the term "renewable" – making these sources sound like they are environmentally acceptable. This happens when lobbyists do not disclose who they are working for and with what aim. Worse, some legislators may believe their claims of "renewable."

This is part of a pattern of deception by the fossil fuel industry which has haunted this country for decades. Elected officials, and the public need to understand who they are talking to and what their motivations are, to ensure accountability on all sides and move our clean energy transition forward, not back. HB 1360 brings this much-needed transparency a little closer and to a level comparable to most other States. It requires two commonsense additional in-session filings of full reports, including position. This is easily done and would help elected officials and the public understand the motivation of all lobbyists.

To strengthen Maryland Ethics Commission (MEC) effectiveness, data should be easily and immediately available for download, in batches, for legislators and the public, in real time during a bill hearing. Similarly, to hold lobbyists accountable, the MEC could make their database



searchable to see what corporations have engaged which lobbyists, and, with the passage of HB1360, what position each is taking on each bill as a control measure. Suspending lobbyists who do not provide full transparency would help avoid the continued obfuscation and confusion as to what, and with what aim, each lobbyist is promoting for each bill. Important examples of this ongoing confusion include:

- The Forest Product Industry presenting their market expansion as a net positive for the environment and high jacking terms such as “conservation”, “management”, or “stewardship” for different types of logging procedures, thereby widely confusing legislators and the public.
- CSX’s Curtis Bay coal terminal and The Children’s Guild –which runs a school for children with disabilities located less than two miles from the coal terminal- both being represented by the same lobbyist: What position are they taking on coal bills?

This type of confusion directly impacts the health, quality of life, and even the lifespan of our friends in environmental justice communities, not to mention depleting our natural resources, and exacerbating climate change. Unfortunately, the same is happening at county levels. Lobbyists sideline enormous, long-term grassroots efforts because NGOs’ donator-based funding cannot compare with that of large for-profit corporations and because the system is opaque.

The lack of transparency undermines Marylander’s efforts, their trust in their elected officials, and in the system at large. The first purposes listed in the Public Ethics Law are 1) “To assure the people of the impartiality and independent judgement of officials and employees (including State board and commission members)”; and 2) “To avoid improper influence or even the appearance of improper influence.” Today, this assurance of impartiality, independent judgment, and lack of outside influence, is much needed. This little step forward in the fight for transparency with HB 1360 may, in itself, become a test of Maryland leadership and their willingness to put People and Planet over Profit - or not- by passing this bill, or not.

To conclude: Maryland is not acting on climate and environmental justice issues at the speed that the triple climate, biodiversity, and pollution crisis requires, because big polluters and their lobbyists can afford to control a misleading narrative with large budgets and by not disclosing their true motivations. Environmental and climate justice organizations do not remotely have a comparable level of funding to these big for-profit corporations. To level the playing field, ideally, we would take all fossil fuel money of politics. Until then, this bill is a good first step in the right direction.

The Climate Communications Coalition respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 1360.

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