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Government, Labor, and
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Chair, Labor Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0572
ATTORNEY GENERAL ACTIONS AND CLIMATE CRIMES ACCOUNTABILITY FUND
(CLIMATE CRIMES ACCOUNTABILITY ACT)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 17, 2026

Climate change is already at a crisis point and will only continue to worsen. We already see communities - here, across the nation, and worldwide - facing its escalating impacts, which come at a very high human and fiscal cost. These include rising sea levels, wildfires that threaten homes and native habitats, agricultural losses and declining plant health, disruptions to aquatic and marine life, and more frequent extreme weather events like sweltering heatwaves causing heat-related illnesses and deaths as well as intense storms leading to flooding and infrastructure damage. These challenges are not only becoming more and more disruptive to our everyday lives, but place financial and environmental burdens on Maryland residents, businesses, and our state and local governments.

Since 1968, the coal, oil, and gas industry discovered 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 “catastrophic” by 2060. However, they hid this information from the public and conducted business in ways that would deliberately worsen climate change, prioritizing profit over the health of our people and our planet.

Maryland taxpayers should not have to pay the costs associated with these impacts, which will only increase as the global temperature rises and the climate crisis worsens. Maryland’s Attorney General must have the power to hold these companies accountable, as has been authorized previously with tobacco and opioids, so that they pay their fair share for the consequences of their actions and taxpayers like you and me do not.

This bill authorizes the Office of the Attorney General to file suits against major companies involved in extracting, refining, or processing oil, coal, and gas to do just that: hold them accountable for any tortious or other unlawful conduct, including fraud or deception, that contributed to climate change. It also grants the Attorney General an exception to the UCATA law for these suits, which

Attorney General Anthony Brown has stated is necessary. The exception to UCATA is narrowly targeted, like the exception we made for the Key Bridge suits.

This would truly be limited to large companies: publicly traded ones with a market capitalization greater than \$1 billion. We understand the need to protect smaller companies that did not engage in the aforementioned fraudulent and deceptive actions on a massive scale. It also only applies to those who are or were engaged in extracting, refining, or processing oil, coal, or gas. Additionally, this bill creates the Climate Crimes Accountability Fund where any money resulting from such a settlement or judgement would be placed. Like the similar fund for opioid-related lawsuits, this money would be used to fund mitigation of the climate change-related damage resulting from these companies unlawful actions so that Maryland taxpayers do not have to bear all the costs of bad actors' illegal practices.

The areas of our state most vulnerable to climate change-related damage understand that repairing damaged infrastructure while dealing with major economic losses is a heavy burden, not to mention the costs of improving our climate resilience. Financing programs to aid in these efforts will help Marylanders now and even more so in the future as we see greater and greater negative effects due to climate change.

I believe it is important to address this bill's fiscal note. Last session, the Office of the Attorney General had stated that only one Assistant Attorney General would be needed alongside access to outside counsel, contrary to this year's note which claims the need two Assistant Attorneys General, an investigator, and a financial analyst. However, the Office of the Attorney General is currently working with the requisite department to determine how this year's fiscal estimates were reached, so there may be updates to the fiscal estimate which I will share with the committee as soon as I hear back. The Maryland Department of Emergency Management submitted a clarifying letter to the committee clarifying its fiscal estimates, and I've also uploaded it to your bill file..

This bill would mark 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 - all through holding these bad actors accountable for their unlawful actions and the resulting damage. Thus, I ask for a favorable report for HB0572.