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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 572

### Climate Crimes Accountability Act

#### *Judiciary Committee*

February 17, 2026

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB 572**, which will create a non-lapsing fund to supplement the state’s efforts to prevent, mitigate, or repair harms caused by climate change. The fund will be filled by the Attorney General’s (AG) Office fining fossil fuel companies with market values greater than \$1 billion for unlawful conduct, like fraud and deception, they have engaged in that have harmed Marylanders’ environments. The fund will also pay for the costs of investigating climate perpetrators and disbursing funds. **Establishing the Climate Crimes Accountability Fund will help bring justice to Marylanders harmed by climate change.**

**HB 572 applies practical justice by fining fossil fuel corporations for their unlawful actions and using money generated from those fines to help alleviate climate harms to Marylanders.** Without accountability and justice, these companies will continue to profit, while Marylanders suffer health and monetary damages from the flooding,<sup>i,ii</sup> extreme heat,<sup>iii</sup> and air pollution<sup>iv</sup> that fossil fuel corporations’ illegal actions have worsened. Climate damages disproportionately affect historically marginalized groups.<sup>v,vi</sup> **By funding projects that address climate damages in the communities most affected by them, HB 572 helps ensure that Maryland complies with Environmental Article 1-701.**

**Environmental Article 1-701 states that Maryland will seek to provide “equal protection from environmental and public health hazards for all people regardless of race, income, culture, and social status.”** As such, Maryland needs funding to mitigate the floods that pose outsized threats to some of our poorest counties like Somerset and Alleghany,<sup>vii</sup> and cost Baltimore more than \$2 million annually.<sup>viii</sup> Maryland needs funding to lessen the climate threats exacerbated by city infrastructure, like extreme heat, which is deadliest to seniors and young children,<sup>ix</sup> and coal-induced asthma hospitalizations, whose rates are three times higher in Baltimore neighborhoods like Brooklyn and Hawkins Point than elsewhere.<sup>x</sup> Maryland needs funding to reduce the air and noise pollution in Lothian.<sup>xi</sup> And Maryland needs funding to address saltwater intrusion on the Eastern Shore, which has devastated more than 70,000 acres of forest along with many Black-owned farms.<sup>xii</sup> **Ameliorating damages like these requires significant investment, which HB 572 will help to secure.**

**Investing in climate infrastructure is fiscally responsible; it will improve people's lives while saving the state money.** In the last 45 years, climate damages – not accounting for ongoing health damages, personal inconvenience, loss of human life – have cost Maryland between \$10 billion and \$20 billion.<sup>xiii</sup> As extreme climate events intensify, the damage they cause will worsen, the repair costs will rise, and – without responsible legislation – Maryland and its residents will be on the hook. **HB 572 would reverse the trend of Marylanders paying for climate damages by compelling the companies that cause them to ameliorate them, thus fortifying Maryland against future climate damage.** Moreover, prevention and mitigation efforts funded by the bill will keep Maryland on track to reduce its greenhouse

gas emissions as outlined in the Climate Solutions Now Act. As such, the **Climate Crimes Accountability Act will stave off costly litigation for Maryland's not complying with its law.**

**Marylanders expect their government to comply with their own laws; moreover, they should expect that corporations doing business here obey the law.** HB 572 will simultaneously empower the AG to procure funds to improve Marylanders' environmental safety and health, and investigate lawbreaking companies, which increases corporate transparency and accountability. Marylanders want this legislation. In fact, according to a representative sample, **a majority of Marylanders report that their opinions of their legislators would improve if they supported legislation that compels large fossil fuel companies to pay for infrastructure projects in the state.**<sup>xiv</sup>

Because it will enhance Marylanders' environmental safety, put our state in compliance with our laws, and improve corporate transparency and accountability, **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB 572.**

*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

<sup>i</sup>Sears, B. 2025. Cost of Western Maryland flood damage more than doubles. <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/08/19/cost-of-western-maryland-flood-damage-more-than-doubles-state-to-appeal-fema-aid-denial/>

<sup>ii</sup>Alexander, J. 2024. Worse and Worse. <https://wtop.com/anne-arundel-county/2024/08/8th-worst-flood-on-record-debbys-aftermath-causes-annapolis-to-declare-state-of-emergency/>

<sup>iii</sup>Maryland 2025 Heat-Related Illness Surveillance Summary Report. <https://health.maryland.gov/preparedness/Documents/2025%20Heat-Related%20Illness%20Surveillance%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Bloomberg School of Health staff report. 2025. Air Pollution in Baltimore's Curtis Bay Community Linked to Nearby Coal Terminal Activity, Wind. Johns Hopkins University. <https://hub.jhu.edu/2025/07/21/baltimore-curtis-bay-air-pollution-coal-terminal/>

<sup>v</sup>Coelho et al.. 2025. Global socioeconomic disparities in exposure to extreme heat. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-025-04075-3>

<sup>vi</sup> Robbins, H. 2025 Baltimore-Area Residents Worry about Effects of Climate Change. <https://hub.jhu.edu/2025/03/06/baltimore-area-survey-climate-change-and-race/>

<sup>vii</sup> Hananel, J. 2022. Environmental justice issues in Maryland <https://climate-xchange.org/2022/01/a-look-at-environmental-justice-issues-in-maryland/>

<sup>viii</sup> Allen, S. 2025. Climate Change is a Local Issue. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2025/07/07/climate-change-is-a-local-issue-and-heres-whats-happening-in-every-part-of-maryland/>

<sup>ix</sup> Brown, D.J. 2025. Hundreds went to emergency rooms, 7 died from heat-related illness in June heat wave. Maryland Matters. <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/07/08/hundreds-landed-in-emergency-rooms-seven-died-from-heat-related-illness-during-june-heat-wave/?emci=762b7085-ee5b-f011-8f7c-6045bdf8e9c&emdi=5addae87-f95b-f011-8f7c-6045bdf8e9c&ceid=622399>

<sup>x</sup> Kelly, L. & Burkhart K. 2017. Asthma and Air Pollution in Baltimore City. Environmental Integrity Project. <https://environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Baltimore-Asthma.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> Wheeler, T. 2023. ...Fighting Industrial Activity [https://www.bayjournal.com/news/local\\_government/despite-setback-maryland-community-aims-to-continue-fighting-industrial-activity/article\\_12572ac2-540b-11ee-b538-0f3500952efc.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/news/local_government/despite-setback-maryland-community-aims-to-continue-fighting-industrial-activity/article_12572ac2-540b-11ee-b538-0f3500952efc.html)

<sup>xii</sup> Allen, S. 2025. Climate Change is a Local Issue. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2025/07/07/climate-change-is-a-local-issue-and-heres-whats-happening-in-every-part-of-maryland/>

<sup>xiii</sup> Comptroller of Maryland. 2025. State Spending Series: Climate Change Costs <https://www.marylandcomptroller.gov/content/dam/mdcomp/md/reports/research/state-spending-series-climate-change-costs-april-2025.pdf>

<sup>xiv</sup> Gonzales Poll. (2024). Infrastructure investments. <https://ccanactionfund.org/media/Gonzales-Poll-CCAN-Infrastructure-Investments.pdf>