



HB0572 - SUPPORT  
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## HB0572, Climate Crimes Accountability Act

### Meeting of the Judiciary Committee

February 17, 2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee, on behalf of Elders Climate Action Maryland, I urge a favorable report on HB0572, the Climate Crimes Accountability Act.

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state.

Each day, we see the climate crisis more clearly. We know that Maryland is at risk for sea level rise, flooding from intense rainfall, heat waves, and other extreme weather events.

The major cause of this crisis is climate pollution from burning fossil fuels. Exxon has known about this potentially devastating problem since at least 1967<sup>1</sup>. But instead of taking positive action to change their business model, they and other major fossil fuel companies engaged in a decades-long campaign of deception, which has caused immense damage in Maryland and throughout the world.

The Maryland Office of the Comptroller estimates this cost to be between 10 and 20 billion dollars, based on 85 identified severe weather events in our state between 1980 and 2024. Climate scientists agree that these events will worsen as

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Hall, "Exxon Knew about Climate Change Almost 40 Years Ago," Scientific American, accessed February 6, 2026, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/exxon-knew-about-climate-change-almost-40-years-ago/>.

the climate continues to warm.<sup>2</sup> It is unfair for Marylanders to have to pay for these escalating damages while those who profited from causing them are not held accountable.

The Climate Crimes Accountability Act authorizes the Attorney General to investigate, commence, prosecute, or defend any action by large fossil fuel companies (market capitalization above \$1 billion) for any unlawful conduct (civil or criminal) that has contributed to climate change. HB0572 also waives Maryland's Uniform Contribution Among Joint Tortfeasors Act (UCATA) for actions brought under this bill. Waiving UCATA facilitates settlements with one or more of the parties held responsible for climate damages since it allows a judge or jury to determine comparative responsibility rather than encouraging additional lawsuits among the liable parties to determine relative financial responsibility. It also allows the Attorney General to hire outside counsel, which would lessen the burden on the Attorney General's office, provide specialized expertise, and be more cost-effective. With these provisions, HB0572 now has the Attorney General's wholehearted support and is one of his two top priorities.

The Attorney General also has the advantage of learning from similar lawsuits brought in other states and local jurisdictions. In that vein, this Committee may want to consider defenses alleged by major fossil fuel companies in those other cases, including the litigation brought by the City of Annapolis, and consult with the Attorney General about possibly expanding the list of parties that could be sued to include industry trade or research associations, such as the American Petroleum Institute.

HB0572 also establishes a separate Climate Crimes Accountability Fund to ensure that any recovery funds are used solely to supplement state programs that prevent, mitigate, or repair harms caused by climate change. The bill includes a broad list of adverse effects of climate change that the fund could address through various programs. These are separate funds from those that might be obtained under the RENEW Act if that or a similar bill is introduced and enacted in a subsequent session.

We strongly urge a **favorable** report on the Climate Crimes Accountability Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> "Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate," accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/chapter-11/>.