



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 298 (Delegate Charkoudian)  
Utility Regulation - Consideration of Climate and Labor**

January 21, 2021

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of House Bill 298. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation as part of the forward-thinking mandate for climate consideration and climate action favored by the people of Maryland.

HB 298 requires the Public Service Commission (PSC) to consider issues related to climate change and fair labor standards in its deliberations. Current statute does not, in the words of the PSC, “specifically or generally require considerations regarding climate change,” and the Commission “is not mandated to make decisions about labor standards.” Strong Future Maryland believes the PSC should consider climate actions in its regulation of the utility sector, using the best available scientific information, as well as require energy companies to disclose the benefits they will provide to workers on specific energy projects.

Just last week, an international group of scientists released a paper stating the planet is facing a “ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction. The 17 experts say the planet is in a much worse state than most people – even scientists – understood.

“The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts,” they write in a report in [Frontiers in Conservation Science](#) which references more than 150 studies detailing the world’s major environmental challenges.

Notably, the impacts of our slowly warming planet are inextricably intertwined with all our other challenges. Climate change impacts the likelihood of future pandemics, climate-induced mass migrations, and battles over resources. It affects Maryland’s agricultural economy, the ability of our biodiversity to thrive, and the health of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays. As Maryland already faces severe air quality issues, climate change further compromises the health of our residents.

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As a country, we are in the midst of a new racial reckoning, and we must not ignore the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by communities of color and low-income communities. According to a [2015 report](#) from the Environmental Law Clinic of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, socioeconomically disadvantaged and African American communities in Maryland bear a disproportionate burden of cancer risk from air toxics exposure and are also more likely to live in close proximity to toxic releasing facilities like incinerators. The American Lung Association 2020 [“Road to Clean Air” report](#) gives Maryland abysmal grades for smog or ozone pollution, including F's for both Baltimore and Prince George's County. Across Baltimore, the hottest areas tend to be the poorest and that pattern is not unusual. In dozens of major U.S. cities, low-income neighborhoods are more likely to be hotter than their wealthier counterparts.

Maryland must do more for climate action — in the name of environmental justice, for the health of our communities, and for the future of our families. This committee can make a commitment to that work by ensuring climate and labor considerations are key factors in decisions by our state government regarding the energy sector.

For all of these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 298.

*John B. King Jr.*  
*Founder and Board Chair*

*Alice Wilkerson*  
*Executive Director*

