



Testimony on HB66
Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU- the largest healthcare union in the nation, where we represent over 10,000 healthcare workers in Maryland. Given the vast inequities in public health caused by greenhouse gas emissions, we are supportive of HB066- The Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021.

For our members, the health outcomes caused by coal plants affect both their professional and personal lives. Professionally, their workloads and resources are stretched thin responding to coal-related illness. Coal plants discharge heavy metals like mercury, arsenic, and selenium, which end up in bodies of water and soil. Mercury impairs brain development, arsenic is known to cause cancer, and selenium damages the nervous system. Coal plants are also major contributors to smog, which lead to respiratory problems such as asthma.

Personally, our members- a majority of whom are minorities- are statistically unequally exposed to the negative impacts of coal plants. All six of Maryland's coal plants received a D grade average in the NAACP's 2016 Coal Blooded report, which measures environmental justice. According to a Maryland report on asthma, emergency room visits for Black residents in Charles County were about three times higher for white residents.

With these facts about coal plants and opportunities to invest in clean energy, Maryland should pass this Act for the safety of our members and all Marylanders. Not only would this Act improve public health outcomes, but it would also provide support for historically polluted areas, a majority of which are in minority communities. These communities have been harmed by environmental pollution for years and deserve compensation. The state of Maryland may never be able to actually pinpoint all of the illnesses and complications that have impacted Black and Brown communities due to coal plants, but enacting this legislation is the first step for rehabilitation for these communities. We also strongly support this bill because of the funds dedicated to clean-energy job training.

For this reason, we believe that this Act will create the necessary structure in place to decrease coal pollution and improve public health for all Marylanders. We ask that you support the Maryland Coal Community Transition Act of 2021.

Respectfully,

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