



**Testimony in Support of SB 414 – Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021
(Chairman Pinsky)**

January 28, 2021

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of SB 414. 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 action favored by the people of Maryland, and for its focus on environmental justice.

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.

This bill takes critical climate action measures that meet the urgency of this moment in time.

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 the Environmental Protection Agency, communities of color and low-income communities in the United States are often disproportionately burdened by environmental and public health hazards, and enjoy fewer benefits from environmental programs and natural resources.

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.

At the same time, by all accounts, Maryland is severely lacking when it comes to having policies on the books that advocate for Environmental Justice. The most important note from the aforementioned 2015 report: is that most of the formal recommendations made to the General Assembly languished over the period of 1999-2015. The Law Clinic states:

“Maryland should adopt a more systematic and transparent approach to addressing environmental justice issues, including requiring each state agency to develop an environmental justice strategy and regularly report on its progress. The state should also create an Office of Environmental Justice to coordinate and support environmental justice efforts, expand community representation on the Commission on Environmental Justice, and develop new policies to address and prevent environmental injustice.”

While this legislation does not exactly mirror the recommendations in the report, it places the state on a strategic path towards addressing environmental justice. Specifically, it charges the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities with determining what percent of Maryland’s climate funding must be spent in overburdened, underserved communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change emissions.

In addition, this bill establishes targets that are in line with recommendations from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of the leading climate scientists in the world.

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 issuing a favorable report on SB 414.

John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair

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