

January 28, 2021

Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 414: Climate Solutions Now Act

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

Rock Creek Conservancy expresses its strong support for SB 414: Climate Solutions Now Act and thanks Senator Pinsky for his leadership on this environmental community priority legislation.

Rock Creek Conservancy supports the testimony submitted by Maryland League of Conservation Voters which establishes and applauds the milestones of the Act. Such milestone goals include:

1. Increasing Maryland's greenhouse gas reduction mandate to 60% by 2030 and net zero by 2045;
2. Charging 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;
3. Planting 5 million trees, including 500,000 trees in underserved, urban communities;
4. Prohibiting highway widening and unproven carbon capture and storage technology as emissions reduction pathways in our state climate planning;

The Conservancy wants to emphasize the importance of tree canopy coverage as a tool to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Developed canopies help to slow both the infiltration of rainwater into ground systems and impervious surface runoff. As we have witnessed increasingly frequently in recent years, storms that hit the Rock Creek Watershed create flood events that impact roads and further erode protective banks. Just this past September 10th, we saw several water rescues on Beach Drive due to flooding from a major precipitation event.

In tandem with these goals, the Act will also further the social justice goals of climate resiliency through the following guiding principles:

1. Reduce harmful carbon emissions in order to improve public health;
2. Ensure a portion of state climate funds are spent on environmental justice communities;
3. Help create jobs at all levels;
4. Invest in tree-planting, focusing on underserved urban communities

Canopy coverage is also an environmental justice issue. Canopy coverage has a mitigative impact on urban heat island effect; during the summer months, urban areas often experience significantly higher average temperatures than geographically similar areas with higher tree

canopy coverage. As heat waves become more frequent and more intense, increasing canopy coverage helps protect urban populations from the dangers of extreme heat. There are significant correlations between low-income communities in highly urbanized areas and heat-related public health concerns, making canopy coverage a tool to address the overarching disparity in the severity of climate impacts across demographic groups and increase community resilience.

Rock Creek Conservancy is committed to restoring the Rock Creek watershed in ways that promote climate resilience and equity of access to ecosystem services. The Climate Solutions Now Act would be a major tool in that effort.