



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 583 – Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021
House Environment and Transportation Committee
February 11, 2021

OPPOSE

Donna S. Edwards
President
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Chairman and members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 583 – Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HB 583 is an enormous bill, affecting nearly every sector of Maryland's economy. From planting trees to cleaning up the Bay, from electric vehicles to energy generation, this bill leaves no corner of the State untouched in its effects. We realize that is by design, and that the call for "bold" action on Climate Change is reaching a fevered pitch.

We agree that the time to act on climate is now. It is no coincidence that the building trades unions in Maryland have had clean energy training – specifically in solar and wind – for their Apprenticeship programs since 1999. Maryland's Building and Construction Trades Unions have led the way in quality training on the construction and installation of renewable energy generating facilities. They know the future of work in the construction of alternative energy is towards a cleaner future and are planning accordingly. However, unions also understand that to navigate this path requires equally bold thinking and action in creating and maintaining high-quality jobs with benefits. We cannot sacrifice the livelihoods of workers in pursuit of a clean energy future. A clean future needs to coincide with a bright future for workers. To do anything less is to engender anger and resentment at the loss of high road jobs and decline in standard of living, inviting a backlash against and less money to contribute to the very thing that we all agree should be our goal: A sustainable clean environment and reversal of Climate Change for the generations that follow behind us, and a vibrant economy that values the dignity of work.

HB 583 is very heavy on the former and exceptionally light on the latter. There are multiple instances within the bill of audacious environmental policies, some we believe should be expanded such as requiring all future new construction and renovations budgeted by the IAC should specify green components. The bill pays short shrift to all the workers that currently provide us with the vast majority of Maryland's energy needs.

While it does create a new working group ostensibly titled the “The Just Transition Employment and Retraining Working Group”, its charge is limited, and there is no actual language committing to a discussion to a Just Transition. It leaves thousands of workers that are within a decade or less of retirement in the lurch, scrambling to figure out how to make their pensions – of which they have paid into for years – whole, as well as trying to cobble together stop-gap work to maintain their living standards and make it until retirement. There is no mention of loss of or provision for health care for workers losing their jobs or being retrained. Without the discussion of a Just Transition, the workgroup as described should be titled “The Retraining Working Group” because that is its only focus.

We need to have a sincere discussion about what a Just Transition would look like in Maryland. It will require the political resolve of the Maryland General Assembly to dedicate real money and real resources to keep workers whole in the face of a changing energy landscape. And in the absence of setting up a real Just Transition, we cannot simply charge ahead with liquidating good-paying jobs for Maryland without creating well paid jobs in the local region for displaced workers to transition to for “just transition” to work.

“Just Transition” is a broad concept that encompasses the idea that if society enacts laws that result in lost jobs and closed facilities, those workers and the host communities should be held harmless. Just Transition recognizes that support for environmental policies is conditioned on a fair distribution of the costs and benefits of those policies across the economy.

As described in a recent white paper, transitioning to a 21st Century Energy System¹, “a Just Transition is achieved when dislocated workers and host communities are left unharmed by the closure of a power plant. This means that workforce transition plans are developed and implemented and that workers receive wages and benefits while looking for a new job or training for a new career in an emerging sector. That new opportunity for work keeps the worker within the community that he or she resided in when their job at the power plant ended. That new job has the same labor standards, collective bargaining rights, and upward career mobility as the one that preceded it.”

HB 583 ultimately burns down the bridge before the tunnel is built. As of January 26, under the PJM, 107,556 MWs are being used, with only 6,772MWs coming from existing renewable energy sources. Only 6% of our energy is being produced by renewable energy. If we are serious about environmental policy in Maryland, then our legislation should reflect that by focusing on building the necessary base load energy before turning off other sources. It should be focused on incentivizing renewable energy production that also creates high-quality, family sustaining jobs.

We cannot make a choice between the environment and good jobs. We must do both.

We ask for an unfavorable report on HB 583.

¹ Transitioning to a 21st Century Energy System, Ross Gould, Esq., WDI; Ellen Redmond, IBEW; Lara Skinner, PhD, Cornell U ILR School, July 2019