



House Bill 503

Environment - Office on Climate Change - Establishment

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

Date: February 3, 2021

From: Alex Butler

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 503 with amendments. The bill would establish the Office on Climate Change in the Office of the Governor, responsible for a multitude of actions surrounding the State's response to climate change. MACo amendments would add uncodified language clarifying that the new office would not gain unnecessary regulatory oversight.

HB 503 establishes an Office on Climate Change required to (1) facilitate the implementation of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change's recommendations; (2) ensure state agencies address climate change; (3) perform research and investigations into climate change topics identified by the Commission; (4) assist local government in developing climate change plans; and (5) report to the Governor and General Assembly on State actions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Counties are on the front line of the effects of climate change, especially sea level rise and saltwater intrusion. As counties continue to combat climate change in a variety of ways, state support can be a valuable asset. Many counties do not have one department dedicated to climate change or sustainability, but those that do report highly of its effectiveness in coordinating larger efforts and providing support to the rest of the local government. The State should provide research and guidance to counties to plan and develop local actions that address the impacts of climate change in a way that best serves their residents.

MACo amendments to the bill would simply make clear that the Office on Climate Change would not implicitly gain regulatory authority to enact mandates on local government. This reinforces the intent of the original bill to create this Office to serve as a resource. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to provide a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB 503.

MACo amendments:

On page 3, after line 15, insert:

“SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That, notwithstanding any other provision in this Act, this Act shall not be interpreted to grant any new regulatory or oversight authority to either the Maryland Commission on Climate Change or the Office of Climate Change that did not exist prior to its passage. The role of the Office is intended to be advisory and facilitating, and any recommendations for new policy, standards, or requirements – including any affecting local governments or non-governmental stakeholders – would require legislative enactment before having the effect of requiring, regulating, or prohibiting any function or activity.”

On page 3, in line 16, strike “2” and substitute “3”.