

SUPPORT
SB151
Constitutional Amendment-Environmental Rights
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
Favorable

Friday, January 22, 2021

Chairman Smith, Jr.
Chairman Pinsky
Vice-Chair Waldstreicher
Vice-Chair Kagan
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
Members of the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Smith, Jr., Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, Vice-Chair Kagan, Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, and Members of the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee,

My name is Claire Miller and I am writing to you as a concerned citizen who resides in Annapolis, Maryland, and who supports SB151 the Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights.

When I was eight years old, Maryland passed the Maryland Environmental Policy Act. The year was 1973 and the state of Maryland recognized the “fundamental and inalienable right to live in a healthful environment.” When I was eight years old, I was swimming in the Elk River and developing a love of the water and nature in Maryland. As a young girl, I didn’t understand that by swimming in that water I was being exposed to pollutants that could harm my developing body and immune system. I’m sure my parents didn’t realize that either.

Today, as a mature woman, I still have a love of the water, but I would never swim in the Bay or its tributaries, given the knowledge that there are pollutants in the water that are causing infections in humans, animals, and fish. As someone with a weakened immune system and auto-immune diseases, I can’t take that risk. Now that I’ve become more educated about pollutants in our air and water in Maryland and their links to increased rates of chronic illness, it makes me wonder whether my exposure to pollutants as a child is connected with the auto-immune diseases I’ve developed over the course of my life. There is no one else in my family who had these auto-immune diseases, so they are not genetic.

In 1973, Maryland acknowledged the right to live in a healthful environment but limited the scope of the policy to state agencies. Most of the state agencies didn't enact rules to enforce the right, so the policy is dormant. What has transpired in the 48 years since that policy was enacted, is morally abhorrent. For the sake of the economy and those who are privileged, Maryland has allowed low-income communities and black and brown communities to suffer from environmental pollution and degradation. Johns Hopkins School of Public Health did an analysis of South Baltimore that documents 200 permitted pollution emitting facilities in a 2.5-mile radius. Maryland Public Health data shows increased rates of asthma hospitalizations at 4 times the rates of the Maryland average in South Baltimore. Maryland is successfully making decisions that are making the population of Maryland chronically ill. At this moment, it is time for our elected representatives to acknowledge what has been allowed to happen for decades and to start making decisions that "do no harm" to the health of its citizens.

As someone who worked in corporate America for twenty years, the engine of growth is innovation. The Maryland legislature can help businesses by encouraging innovation in the form of environmental health and sustainability. By supporting the Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights and serving as a trustee of Maryland's Natural Resources, our state can be the driver of innovation in requiring businesses to deliver their products and services in a manner that does not pollute the environment and harm the health of the citizens.

I know what I'm asking for is a fundamental shift in thinking and action. I'm asking as a person of faith because it is morally the right thing to do. You can't unsee the harm that the state is causing the health of current and future generations of Marylanders. Every single piece of environmental legislation heard in front of the General Assembly is related to the right to live in a healthful environment. By protecting this right in the state constitution and protecting Maryland's natural resources, Maryland will be requiring industry to innovate to help sustain this state in a manner that all citizens of the state can live and thrive. It is a vision of Maryland that only the legislature can enact. I ask for a favorable report of SB151 Constitutional Amendment -- Environmental Rights and allow the voters to have their say on the future they are leaving for their children.

Sincerely,

Claire Miller, Communications Director
Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights
www.mdehr.org