



**Title** | HB0596 Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights  
**Position** | Favorable

February 21, 2022

### TESTIMONY

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members,

The NAACP Maryland State Conference is asking your committee to support HB0596, the Constitutional Amendment for Environmental Rights, to codify Marylanders fundamental and inalienable right to a healthy environment with clean air, water, and land, a stable climate, as well as the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the environment.

This Amendment formally recognizes environmental rights as civil rights which enables communities impacted by environmental injustice to seek interventions to help mitigate cumulative environmental impacts and to help remedy and restore us, so we may enjoy a *dignified* human existence. This Amendment is a tool of a *civilized* society.

Race is the number one indicator of where toxic waste and pollution facilities are located, regardless of economic status. As a result, pollution and other environmental hazards are concentrated in communities of color. The Baltimore-Washington metropolitan region has the nation's second worst ozone levels. This pollution is a result of multiple power plants, incineration, and vehicle (CO2) emissions. Many low-wealth communities of color are concentrated around these facilities and roadways. **South Baltimore/Curtis Bay** has more that 200 polluting facilities within a 1-mile radius. In Baltimore City, an area most affected by toxic air, also has the highest rates of death related to air quality IN THE COUNTRY. The City's lung cancer rate is more than 25% above the US rate. **Prince George's County** is home to the state's only sewage sludge incinerator, multiple landfills, and asphalt/aggregate industries, as well as FOUR coal/gas power plants in a 13-mile radius. Breathing chronically polluted air can reduce lung function by 20% and can lead to a higher risk of death from COVID-19. Prince George's County makes up 16% of the state's population but makes up 20% of all COVID-19 related deaths. **Brandywine** has more fossil fuel capacity that 99.9% of the country and it is 67% Black. Sands Road, in **Anne Arundel County**, has been dubbed a "Diesel Death Road" and the area is also plagued with "zombie permits" which allow raw sewage run-off and worse. We need this Amendment as a tool to help remedy a near century of environmental indifference which has endangered the lives and futures of our most vulnerable residents. We cannot continue to pile polluting services in these communities and expect them to thrive.

The natural resources of the State belong to the people, not corporations. The State has the responsibility to protect, preserve, and enhance these resources. I urge you all to pass HB0596, to make sure communities of color are given their *fundamental and inalienable right* to a clean, safe, and beautiful environment and that State entities are held responsible for neglecting, endangering, and harming them though their environment.

Respectfully submitted,

Staci Hartwell, Chair  
**NAACP Maryland State Conference**  
Environmental and Climate Justice Committee