

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB596 – Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights
Submitting: Rhonda Kranz (5 Montgomery Ave, Takoma Park, MD)
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 23, 2022

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing my testimony in support of HB596 – Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights. The Amendment would provide an essential right to citizens of Maryland and is long overdue. I urge you in to vote favorably on HB596.

HB596, if passed and approved by voters in November, would enshrine in Maryland's Constitution:

- (A) That each person has a fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and sustainable environment, and said right shall not be infringed.
- (B) That the State, as trustee, shall protect, conserve, and enhance Maryland's natural resources, including its air, lands, waters, wildlife, and ecosystems, for the benefit of both present and future generations."

The addition of this amendment to the Declaration of Rights section of the Maryland Constitution would codify our basic right to a healthy and safe environment. This is just as basic as our right to freedom of speech. It would give all citizens the ability to hold state and local governments accountable, which is particularly important for communities long burdened with environmental injustices.

We need this amendment to insure that existing and new environmental laws are implemented and enforced, and that if they are not, changes and redress occur in a timely manner. Maryland has an ongoing problem of lack of enforcement in some areas such as discharge permits. The amendment would give Maryland citizens a tool to address these and other problems without having to rely on new laws or long delays.

The health of Maryland citizens is dependent on the health of our environment. Citizens are impacted by the quality of our air and water, pollution, infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and maintenance of natural areas. We suffer from health problems related to environmental quality, in my case asthma and other respiratory issues. We should have direct ability to insure that our health is a priority.

Finally, passing HB596 does not ask the Environment and Transportation committee to adopt the Constitutional Amendment; it asks you to decide if the voters should be given the right to choose if they want the environment and their health to be a codified priority in the State, and they be given a role in ensuring laws are enforced.

Please vote in favor of HB596 so Marylanders can decide if they want to add environmental human rights to their Constitution.