

Environmental Rights Amendment

Public Health Need | Submitted by Megan Weil Latshaw, PhD MHS

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Committee members, I'm here to speak in support of House Bill 596.

I'm Dr. Megan Latshaw, and live in Baltimore City in District 43 with Delegates [Anderson](#) and [Boyce](#), and am on faculty at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health & Engineering. The opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Hopkins.

Some people think of the earth as a fishbowl. If you ever won a goldfish at the fair but didn't have a fancy aquarium, the fish died quickly. That's because too much of its waste built up in the water, and it ran out of oxygen.

Just like the fish, we humans use up our natural resources, and we pollute the planet with our waste. Pollution can be released directly into the air or water, and gets into plants and animals. Ultimately, it gets into us.

All of this impacts our health. . . Our leading causes of death in were heart disease, cancer, and stroke. These illnesses typically aren't linked to infectious diseases, rather they're linked to behaviors, genetics and our environment.

You already know about the connections between environmental exposures and cancer, as well as connections between air pollution and respiratory diseases. But not many people realize how we design our communities contributes to our health. Those of us who live in communities designed for walking or who live near parks are much more likely to engage in physical activity. Those of us who live in communities designed for cars are much more likely to drive, leading to increased air pollution and greenhouse gases.

It's these and so many other connections between our environment and health, that make an amendment like this so important. This amendment brings a systems approach to caring for the environment rather than trying to address individual issues as they arise.

[CDC EH Tracking Network

- 9.4% of people in MD have asthma (vs 7% nationwide)

- 64% of people living in Maryland lived within half a mile of a park (vs 75% nationwide [www.nrpa.org › globalassets › engagement-survey-report-2018])