



Committee: Environment & Transportation Committee

Testimony on: HB596 Environmental Human Rights Amendment

Organization: Greenbelt Climate Action Network

Submitting: Kathleen Bartolomeo

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: Hearing Wed, Feb 23

Dear Chairman and Committee Members:

The Greenbelt Climate Action Network (GCAN) is writing in **support of HB596 Environmental Human Rights Amendment.**

Our most important message is **LET THE VOTERS DECIDE!**

GCAN's mission is to educate residents about climate change, “systemic” solutions, how they can change their behaviors to be more sustainable, and take personal, local, systemic, and political action.

There are more than 100 constitutions across the world that have adopted a human right to a healthy environment, often serving as power to protect the natural world. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/355/14/PDF/G1935514.pdf?OpenElement> Several states, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, have language in their constitutions about protecting the environment. Other states are in the process of protecting their environment. We are hoping that Maryland can join this group and make climate a priority for our citizens.

At this time 30 delegates have signed this bill. From polls taken 75% of Marylanders would vote for this amendment if placed on the ballot.

As you know, communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of the ill effects of pollution due to proximity to toxic facilities. Southern Maryland’s two areas, Brandywine 4 coal fired power plants, toxic waste, Rt. 5 and 301. Eagle Harbor’s Mayor Noah Waters says that it “seems that it’s a no-brainer” to have this amendment as it establishes a framework.

Over 85% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet EPA healthy air standards for smog pollution. Baltimore, for example has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country, 20% – more than double the national average.

While the Maryland Constitution declares the rights to vote and to education mention of the environment is nowhere to be found.

This amendment would make a healthful environment a core responsibility and priority of our government, requiring the state to protect these rights for Marylanders today and for future generations. Over time it, would serve as a foundation for more effective environmental laws, regulations, and administration.

It would state that each person, as a matter of basic human dignity, has a fundamental and inalienable right to a health, sustainable environment.

The State also, would be the trustee, protecting, conserving, managing, and enhancing Maryland's natural and cultural resources, including its air, lands, waters, wildlife, and ecosystems, for the benefit and enjoyment of both present and future generations.

After this bill passes by a 3/5 majority, it will go for a referendum in November. It is time to let the voters decide if they want to add these ideas to our state constitution.

For all these reasons, we recommend a **FAVORABLE report for Bill HB596** Environmental Human Rights Amendment In the Environment & Transportation Committee.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Bartolomeo, Volunteer
Greenbelt Climate Action Network