

Good afternoon! My name is Riya Sharma and I am a student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am the co-president of an environmental justice organization called 17 For Peace and Justice. We students are here today because respect for the environment, and in turn human life, is not reflected in Maryland legislation. We are the generation that has to live and work in the degraded environment left behind by past generations. We should not have to beg for a healthful environment- it should have been handed down to us. We are overwhelmed. We are tired. We are scared. We have had enough.

Maryland is one of the richest states in the country. We have an incredibly high median household income, excellent education systems, and a booming job market. All of this might lead us to believe that we are successful enough and progressive enough, but what good does being one of the richest states do when we cannot even protect the basic human right to a healthful environment?

I'd like to address the tragedy of the Anacostia River. The Anacostia River runs through Prince George's County and into D.C. It is incredibly close to College Park, only a short drive away from us UMD students. It is one of the most polluted rivers in America and contains a mixture of raw sewage, heavy metals, oils, pesticides, and more. These contaminants disproportionately impact those who live along the Anacostia River- primarily black communities. Many of those communities also suffer from high poverty rates. According to a study funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, many local fishermen do not have access to affordable food and resort to catching and eating contaminated fish out of the Anacostia River. Unsurprisingly, the fishermen who are most affected tend to be African-American, Latino, or

Asian. How can we expect to move toward a more socially-just society while we allow environmental injustice?

I'd like to reiterate that all of this is happening about 20 minutes away from our university, where we live and work. This isn't happening in another country, or even another state. This is the reality of Maryland. It is here that I see the Anacostia River left completely unprotected. It is here that I see people in the Curtis Bay and Brooklyn neighborhoods of Baltimore developing lung disease from worsening air pollution. It is here that I see power plants poisoning the Chesapeake Bay, along with all of the aquatic life in it. All of these examples say one thing: that the state government has continuously failed the people it was supposed to protect.

Allowing ecological destruction to occur and sitting idle while innocent people suffer creates an outcome no different than taking a weapon and directly inflicting harm. This is its own form of violence. It is ugly. It is unjust. We must value every individual's right to a healthful environment as much as we value our other American freedoms. The Environmental Human Rights Amendment would be more than a law- it would declare a clean and safe environment to be a constitutional right. It has the power to dramatically improve the quality of life for many. Students like me could hope for a safer, healthier future. Students like me need the Environmental Human Rights Amendment to protect us.

Thank you.