



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.

Hearing before the House Appropriations Committee
Maryland General Assembly
March 6, 2024

Statement of Support (FAVORABLE) of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on HB 842 – Environmental Justice - Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based on, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation. MCCH is a voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics—over 450 Maryland Catholics have already signed our statement of support for key environmental bills in this session of the General Assembly—but should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for passage of House Bill 842, Environmental Justice - Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects. As Maryland Catholics, when advocating for the care of our common home, we are guided by the words of Pope Francis. In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si'*,¹ Pope Francis issues a call to “integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 49). In his 2023 apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*,² Pope Francis underscores the urgency of action and again notes that “the effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world.” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 3).

It is clear that disadvantaged communities, disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and climate change, lack the resources and support to combat these challenges effectively. The specific needs of these communities are overlooked under current climate funding allocation processes, and this neglect comes on top of historical underinvestment that exacerbates environmental risks to these communities.

House Bill 842 responds to this need by ensuring that at least 40 percent of specified Federal environmental funds be targeted to overburdened and underserved communities in the State, and an additional 40 percent to communities of color and communities with a high percentage of low- and moderate-income households. Under the provisions of this bill, state agencies will be encouraged to maximize local benefits through high labor standards and community benefits agreements. They will also prioritize projects with demonstrated community backing. The bill establishes an advisory Justice40 Committee to identify infrastructure deficiencies, to recommend projects for Federal funding, and to provide guidelines to better fight climate change. This committee will include representatives from low-income communities, marginalized communities, environmental organizations, and labor organizations. All of these provisions are responsive to Pope Francis’s teaching that “every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 93).

For these reasons, MCCH supports enactment of the bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on House Bill 842.

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the following parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of this apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.