
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 516
Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024
Economic Matters & Environment and Transportation Committees
February 29, 2024

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act of 2024 (CCEJ), which will protect public health and generate an average of \$1.7 billion annually, totaling over \$18 billion by 2034. We support this bill as social work students because it will reduce carbon emissions that further climate change while ensuring that funds are directed to communities more vulnerable to the effects of climate change in Maryland.

By increasing carbon pollution fees, HB 516 is a crucial step towards disincentizing the fossil fuel use that leads to climate change - use that we have long subsidized.¹ Scientists continuously emphasize that we need to stop burning coal and fossil fuels to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change.² Burning fossil fuels keeps heat in the atmosphere, which causes more extreme storms, heat waves, and other severe weather events. Reducing extraction of coal reserves by 90% and oil reserves by 60% will still only give the earth a 50% chance of warming less than 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit.³ The consequences could be devastating if the earth warms more than that amount.

HB 516 establishes pollution fees, and the funds that are collected from these fees will generate about \$1.7 billion annually for the state of Maryland. HB 516 will ensure that 50% of the revenue is allocated to the Climate Crisis Infrastructure fund, which will go towards eligible county governments and be used to fund projects in vulnerable communities. The other 50% of the revenue will go to the Climate Crisis Benefits Fund directed to low-and moderate-income households and energy-intensive trade-exposed (EITE) businesses to protect them from environmental harm.⁴

Climate change affects all of us, but it has and will continue to especially impact low-income communities and communities of color. According to a recent EPA report,

¹ Coady, D., et al. (May 2, 2019). Global fossil fuel subsidies remain large: an update based on country-level estimates. International Monetary Fund.

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2019/05/02/Global-Fossil-Fuel-Subsidies-Remain-Large-An-Update-Based-on-Country-Level-Estimates-46509>

² Unextractable fossil fuels in a 1.5 °C world (September 2021). Nature.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03821-8>

³ To Avoid Extreme Disasters, Most Fossil Fuels Should Stay Underground, Scientists Say (September 2021). NPR.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/09/09/1035250142/to-avoid-extreme-disasters-most-fossil-fuels-should-stay-underground-scientists->

⁴ the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act HB0516 (2024). Rebuild Maryland Coalition.

https://rebuildmdcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/RMC-02.2024-CCEJ-Act-Handout_digital.pdf



For more information, please contact

Allie Serrine
umswasc@gmail.com

Black and African-American individuals are 34% more likely to currently live in areas with the highest projected increases in childhood asthma diagnoses.⁵ Those statistics are alarmingly clear throughout the state of Maryland – a study found that the highest rates of asthma in Baltimore are in majority Black and majority low-income zipcodes with some zipcodes having an asthma rate that is three times higher than the state’s average.⁶ Asthma is one of many chronic health conditions linked to climate change⁷ and will worsen among communities unless addressed with solutions like those proposed in HB 516.

As a member of the Environmental Justice student group at the University of Maryland Baltimore, I know that climate change anxiety runs deep among students at the University. HB 516 would provide concrete solutions to the climate crisis by keeping Maryland on track to deliver the promises passed in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 to reduce the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by 100% by 2045.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB 516.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁵ EPA Report Shows Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Socially Vulnerable Populations in the United States (September 2021). EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-report-shows-disproportionate-impacts-climate-change-socially-vulnerable>

⁶ Baltimore’s asthma hot spots are poor, African-American neighborhoods with lots of empty houses (2017). Capital News Service. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2017/12/04/baltimores-asthma-hot-spot-is-poor-african-american-neighborhood-with-lots-of-empty-houses/>

⁷ D’Amato G. et al. The effects of climate change on respiratory allergy and asthma induced by pollen and mold allergens (Aug 5, 2020). NIH. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32589303/>