

Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB 516 - "Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 29, 2024



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to HB 516, "Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act" (CCEJA). Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan.

CCEJA establishes two funds Household and Employer Benefit Fund and the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund that will be funded through the collection and use of certain greenhouse gas pollution fees. This is a common sense approach to increasing revenues for the state in these challenging times, encouraging the reduction of climate-harming activities, benefiting historically disadvantaged communities, and providing funds to shore up our infrastructure in light of damages already being caused by climate change.

While this an excellent bill overall, we wanted to express particular support for § 2-1221 (G), which would provide up to 50% of the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund to county and municipal governments since this would include funding being available to Local Education Agencies (LEA). LEAs face a particular burden in adapting to climate change because schools are often built in floodplains and other less desirable plots and often have not been renovated to keep up with modern, efficient standards. This is particularly acute for schools located in disproportionately affected communities since they are often the ones that receive the least funding when it comes to capital improvements.

We would encourage a minor change to § 2-1221 (B)(5) to include "clean transportation" in addition to clean energy. Many disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected by the burdens of pollution from transportation, especially carcinogenic diesel pollution. Additionally, due to upfront costs, these same communities will be the last to replace school buses and other polluting diesel vehicles with cleaner electric alternatives.

CCEJA will provide much-needed funds to allow LEAs to ensure our educational assets are resilient in the face of the climate crisis while activating a fee that will work to reduce the greenhouse gases that are exacerbating the problem in the first place. CCEJA is a common sense approach to reducing the harm from a problem that our children's generation needs solving. The Economic Matters Committee has an opportunity to greatly improve the lives of Marylanders, you must act.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.