Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB 128 - "RENEW Act"
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 23, 2025

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to HB 128, "Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025." 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.

The RENEW ACT establishes a Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Payment Program that will be paid for by a charge to companies that extract fossil fuels or refine petroleum products. The payments will then feed into the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Fund, which will provide important funds to both adapt to the harm faced by Marylanders from already occurring climate change and to help mitigate emissions to lessen the impact Maryland will have on the climate going forward.

The general concept of the RENEW ACT should be applauded, and we are particularly supportive of the efforts in the bill to make sure the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Fund, in part, addresses the negative health impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations.

It also is the morally correct thing to do. The companies that have misled the public over the damages their products have caused to our planet and that will potentially be catastrophic to our children's futures should be made to pay for the damages they have done to Marylanders.

However, we do wish to focus on the particular provisions of the RENEW ACT that are the focus of our campaign and would specifically benefit the children whose planet and well-being have been and continue to be harmed by fossil fuel polluters.

First, we are specifically supportive of § 2-1701(B)(2)(VI), which allows some funds to go towards retrofitting schools and other buildings with efficient heat pumps. Retrofitting existing buildings with sustainable heating solutions has quite high upfront costs, especially for our school systems that are facing the increased, but important, financial pressure from the Blueprint. By providing explicit funding for school systems to install heat pumps in § 2-1701(B)(2)(VI), this legislation will help to overcome a key barrier that school systems face when it comes to holistic heating system retrofits. Additionally, the more schools that replace older inefficient heating systems with heat pumps, the more cost savings will accrue to the school system that can offset some of the increased educational costs from Blueprint implementation.[1][2]

[1] https://www.achrnews.com/articles/153542-heat-pumps-a-popular-alternative-for-k-12-schools
[2] https://rmi.org/four-reasons-why-k-12-schools-are-warming-up-to-heat-pumps/

We are also supportive of § 2-1705 (F)(4)(XI), which would provide funds for resiliency hubs. Due to their central importance in the community, schools are an excellent location for such a hub and the PGPCS Climate Action Plan particularly recommends schools be designed as resilience hubs.

Additionally, we are also supportive of § 2-1705 (F)(4)(XXII), which would provide funds to Zero-Emission Vehicle School Bus Transition Grant Program. This program is important for Maryland schools to transition to electric buses, especially since, while beneficial, the federal funds provided for electric bus transition are not sufficient for a wholesale transition to clean buses.

The RENEW Act is an important step forward in shoring up Maryand to the impacts of climate change and mitigating our impact in the future, all while holding the companies that got us here to account. Our children are counting on the General Assembly to do the right thing by holding the companies that are risking our children's future for profit to account.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report for this important legislation.