



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

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Testimony in Support HB 596 - Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights

To: Chairman Barve and the members of the Environment and
Transportation Committee
From: Phil Webster, PhD, Lead Advocate on Climate Change
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.
Date: February 23, 2022

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) strongly supports **HB 596 Environmental Human Rights Amendment** and urges a FAVORABLE report by the committee.

The UULM-MD is a faith-based advocacy organization based on the Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Two Principles are particularly relevant. The Second Principle, Justice, equity and compassion in human relations and the Seventh Principle, Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarian Universalists believe in justice and equity in human relations. We know that environmental degradation harms marginalized communities with alarming regularity and intensity. We know that the health and dignity of these communities are adversely impacted, with rates of cancer, asthma and early death clearly related to the levels of pollution. We know that these communities, due to the vestiges of years of racial discrimination, do not have resources to engage in lengthy and expensive legislative remedies for the environmental pollution. We know that these communities are not protected by State and Local enforcement of existing laws. And we KNOW this injustice can and must be remediated.

Unitarian Universalists also believe that we should all have respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Environmental pollution degrades water and air quality, contributes to climate change from the use of fossil fuels impacting everyone. Every person on this earth will suffer from environmental degradation and climate change, the only thing we DON'T KNOW is when and to what extent.

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An Environmental Human Rights Amendment to the Maryland Constitution will provide all Maryland residents access to the Judicial systems, by granting them *standing*, to seek redress of environmental damage. The Amendment will give communities, especially those disproportionately affected, a legal tool to fight unfair burdens, and allow individuals and/or organizations to sue the government for violations. This amendment will have a notable impact on justice and equity in our State.

How can there be justice and equity if one part of society is reaping all the benefits, while another is paying all the costs?

We support this bill and recommend a FAVORABLE report in committee.

Phil Webster, PhD

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