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Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: HB 842- Environmental Justice - Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 6, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 842, which would require that a certain percentage of certain federal funds to certain infrastructure construction projects occur in overburdened communities, underserved communities, communities of color, and communities with a high percentage of low- to moderate-income households in the State. The bill would require a State agency, in coordination with the Justice40 Committee established under this Act, to identify overburdened communities, underserved communities, communities of color, and communities with a high percentage of low- to moderate-income households in the State and conduct listening sessions to inform how investments are directed.

The state should prioritize the communities heavily impacted by pollution and historically excluded from decision making and infrastructure resources, including communities of color, low-wealth communities, and rural communities, in the development and implementation of solutions that meet the state's climate goals.

We strongly support infrastructure investments that take steps to dismantle systemic racism and reverse practices that place a disproportionate exposure to air, water, and noise burden on marginalized populations. At the federal level, the Equitable and Just National Climate Platform, which includes Sierra Club among its members, called on the Administration and Congress to mobilize major investments in communities overburdened by pollution and harmed by systemic racism. HB 842 would help Maryland implement the Justice40 initiative.

We additionally note that we support applying a Justice40 framework to federal funding received by Maryland, and expanding into other Maryland areas of work. We urge the legislature to utilize existing standard definitions for Justice40, as well as the terms "overburdened and underserved" to facilitate effective and consistent implementation.

The Moore-Miller Administration has indicated support for Justice40 and encouraged state agencies to begin applying a Justice40 and low and moderate income (LMI) lens to budgeting decisions for urban and rural communities. For these reasons, with attention to ensuring the aforementioned clarity and consistency in the bill, we urge a favorable report on HB 842.

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