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Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: SB 14 - “Sustainable Maryland Program Fund – Establishment”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2022

The Maryland Sierra Club encourages the Committee’s support of SB 14, which would establish ongoing funding for the Sustainable Maryland Program. The Program is delivered by the University of Maryland and supports efforts by Maryland communities to implement sustainable practices. These sustainable practices span a wide range of areas including community-based planning, food consumption and production, energy use, greenhouse gas management, health, and local economies. The program provides a voluntary certification to communities that undertake certain levels of these activities.

The Sustainable Maryland Program helps communities access best practices in a wide range of areas. With the level of funding provided by SB 14, the Program would also be able to provide some grant funding to assist communities in adopting these practices. The Program also holds considerable potential for connecting communities with experts and other resources within the University of Maryland.

The bill would direct that the Governor’s budget provide new ongoing funding of \$750,000 per year, beginning in fiscal year 2024, for the Program. The voluntary certification program offered by Sustainable Maryland appears to be a cost-effective way of helping communities to make meaningful improvements that benefit their residents and the broader environment. As the Committee considers this bill, we would suggest it consider adding a requirement that the program produce and make public on its website an annual report of its activities, including the grants and technical assistance provided, and its budget, including supporting funds from other sources. In addition, the Committee may wish to revisit or sunset the funding provided every four or five years to help support equity and efficacy in operations.

In summary, this bill provides new ongoing funding for a meritorious activity that has the potential for meaningfully assisting residents across Maryland by helping to support and catalyze their local communities. We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.