

Testimony for SB0149  
Support for the Responding to Emergency Needs From  
Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025

Bill Sponsor: Senator Hester  
Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment  
Organization Submitting: Nature Forward  
Person Submitting: Angie McCarthy, Maryland Conservation Advocate  
Position: Favorable



I am submitting testimony on behalf of Nature Forward in strong support of the RENEW Act. Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) is the oldest independent environmental organization protecting nature in the DC metro region, including Maryland's near counties of Montgomery and Prince Georges. Our mission is to inspire residents of Maryland and the Washington, DC, region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education, and advocacy. We thank the Maryland legislators for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2025.

Members of this Committee, and all Marylanders, know that climate change is not happening in a distant future – it is here. The time is now. The 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction Plan necessitated a \$1 billion annual investment in climate solutions in order to meet state climate goals, but did not commit a permanent funding mechanism.<sup>1</sup> The growing impact of climate change in Maryland is evident. Rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns are increasing the intensity of both floods and drought, sea level rise threatens our wetlands, and storm waters threaten our barrier islands. Saltwater is intruding into aquifers near the coast. We need to protect coastal communities, highways and rail lines, and essential communication, energy, and wastewater infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

Key parts of Maryland's fishing and agriculture sectors are vulnerable to increases in acidity and lower oxygen levels in our waters.<sup>3</sup> We are losing the wetlands that are crucial nurseries for fish and shellfish. Our vulnerable tidal marshes are important for food and shelter to animals ranging from the smallest insects to rockfish and striped bass to shore birds. They are home to great blue heron and bald eagles. They are also home to an incredibly rich history of the men and women who have worked on the Bay,

<sup>1</sup> [Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Climate Change in Maryland](#)

<sup>3</sup> Chesapeake Bay Program and [Climate Change](#).



and we cannot lose this natural resource that means so much.<sup>4</sup> Human health is at risk as temperatures rise, particularly for our most vulnerable Marylanders.<sup>5</sup>

While Maryland has been trying to mitigate these impacts for years, a look at some of the most recent steps demonstrates the need to hold the polluters accountable. Governor Wes Moore proposed regulations to achieve 100% clean energy use by 2035 and net zero carbon emissions by 2045. He set a goal of achieving 8.5 gigawatts of wind power generation in the state by 2031 and introduced the Clean Transportation and Energy Act, which increases incentives for people and businesses looking to purchase electric vehicles and install charging stations. The Maryland Department of the Environment's plan to reduce Maryland's greenhouse gases by 60 percent includes rebates for purchasing electric vehicles, removing waste incinerators from the state's renewable energy portfolio, and installing electric heat pumps in residences. Maryland's administrative agencies are working to meet these goals.

These examples are the tip of the iceberg. Families, businesses, and agencies across the state are needing to take action to protect against climate change impacts that are *already here*.

These efforts are not cheap. RENEW gives our state a tool to hold the largest polluting companies accountable. It would establish the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Payment Program and Fund in the Department of the Environment (MDE) to obtain one-time payments from the largest polluting companies – and require the funds be used to support State and local efforts to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. It would protect Maryland's most vulnerable populations by requiring that at least 40% of Fund expenditures support projects that directly benefit communities most affected by climate impacts. At a time when environmental justice is under attack, we need to make sure that Maryland continues to protect its communities.

How do we know this will work? From experience. The idea of making polluters pay for their own harms is long-standing. The federal Superfund law (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act) and program has cleaned up hundreds of toxic sites.<sup>6</sup> The Fiscal Note for SB0149 indicates that cost recovery payment under SB0149 could provide Maryland with billions of dollars to combat climate change harms as early as FY 2028.

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<sup>4</sup> [Series: The Vince Leggett Legacy](#)

<sup>5</sup> [What Climate Change Means for Maryland](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Here's How We Know That Vermont's New Climate Law Will Work](#)



Companies that cause harm and derive benefits should help pay the costs of that harm. As Senator Van Hollen said, when introducing a similar bill in the United States Senate said:

“It’s time that the biggest companies fueling the climate crisis address the harm they have caused. This legislation puts a simple but very powerful principle into action: big polluters should pay to clean up the mess they have made, and those who have polluted the most should pay the most.”<sup>7</sup>

Two states, New York and Vermont, have already enacted similar laws, and several other states, including California and Massachusetts, have introduced similar measures.<sup>8</sup>

As Nature Forward, we support the community forward, compensatory justice approach of this bill. RENEW can provide funds to help Marylanders mitigate climate change harms and meet its environmental goals. We, and our membership of over 30,000, believe Maryland should be a leader in bringing the costs of climate change back to the polluters that benefited. We ask that you vote FAVORABLE on the RENEW Act.

Angie McCarthy  
Maryland Conservation Advocate  
Nature Forward

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<sup>7</sup> [In First Action of 119th Congress, Van Hollen Reintroduces Legislation to Make Polluters Pay for Fueling Climate Change](#)

<sup>8</sup> [New York State To Make Polluters Pay For Climate Impacts | Food & Water Watch](#)  
[Climate Superfund Law Enacted; Vermont Becomes First State to Hold Big Oil Financially Responsible for a Fair Share of Climate Damages](#)