



January 18, 2022

Bill: Global Warming Solutions - Carbon Neutral City (21-0075R)

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Dear Committee Chair McCray and Members of the Committee,

Blue Water Baltimore's mission is to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. We respectfully request your support and expansion of Global Warming Solutions - Carbon Neutral City (21-0075R).

The climate crisis poses significant risks to Baltimore's communities, waterways, and environment, from raw sewage backing up into peoples' homes during heavy rainfall to the urban heat island effect exacerbating asthma and heart failure and increasing energy bills.¹ And the effects of climate change are not felt equally. As a result of systemic disinvestment, Black and brown communities are more vulnerable to climate impacts than white communities.² For example, Broadway East has six times less tree canopy than Roland Park, which can lead to significant temperature differences between these two neighborhoods.³ And data has shown that predominantly Black neighborhoods are more likely to experience dangerous sewage backups than predominantly white neighborhoods.⁴ This means that Black Baltimoreans are bearing the brunt of the public health threat and financial burdens posed by residential sewage backups in a clear example of environmental racism.

Baltimore City must take urgent action to mitigate the effects of climate change and increase the city's resilience in the face of this crisis, and we appreciate the opportunity this resolution creates to convene City agencies, community members, and other stakeholders on this issue. No single piece of legislation or City agency can tackle the climate crisis alone – achieving climate justice requires a community-led, holistic effort with an explicit focus on justice and equity. This resolution makes a necessary call to action and rightly highlights the need for Baltimore City to make transformative changes to the city's core systems to rise to this challenge. As the City Council considers this resolution and how to advance the vision outlined within it through codifying ordinances, it should focus on increasing the City's climate ambitions and centering environmental justice.

Specifically, the City Council should focus on becoming "net zero" rather than "carbon neutral"⁵ and move up the timeline to at least 2045 in alignment with the Maryland Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act.⁶ The City should also establish interim benchmarks from now through 2045 to increase accountability and ensure the City reaches its longer-term goal. Setting incremental targets would mirror the existing framework outlined in the 2019 Sustainability Plan, which included reduction goals of 25% by 2020 and 30% by 2025.⁷

¹ Ian Round, et al. (2019). [Health Risks Rise with the Temperature](#). Capital News Service.

² Joe McCarthy. (2021). [Why Is Climate Change a Racial Justice Issue?](#) Global Citizen.

³ Roxanne Ready, et al. (2019). [No trees, no shade, no relief as climate heats up](#). Capital News Service.

⁴ Faith C. Ezell. (2019). [Residential Sewage Backups in Baltimore City](#). Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

⁵ Torill Bigg. (2021). [Understanding the difference between carbon net zero and carbon neutral is critical](#). New Civil Engineer.

⁶ Maryland Department of the Environment. (2021). [Maryland Releases Bold New Plan to Achieve Climate Goals](#).

⁷ Baltimore Office of Sustainability. (2019). [Sustainability Plan](#). p. 86.

The City Council must also center environmental justice in any efforts to address climate change. To that end, we recommend adding language to this resolution that more explicitly commits to prioritizing the communities that have historically paid the cost for broader economic development and its associated environmental health impacts throughout the planning and implementation of Baltimore's emissions reductions efforts. Suggested language for such an amendment is attached to our testimony.

It is also important to note that "net zero" does not mean the same thing as "zero emissions." Becoming net zero simply means that Baltimore's greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by the amount of emissions the city removes from the atmosphere through carbon sequestration, offsets, or other mechanisms. By contrast, *zero emissions* means a hard end to all emissions with no balance sheet or offsets. Zero emissions should be the ultimate goal in order to truly limit the effects of climate change, but well-crafted net zero policies can help cut emissions and build toward that target.⁸

However, any net zero efforts must be designed to reduce emissions and exposure to pollutants *now* in the communities on the frontlines of this crisis. In Baltimore, that means prioritizing Black, brown, low-income, and formerly redlined neighborhoods, which consistently face disparate levels of pollution and exposure to environmental hazards and subsequent health impacts. For example, in a 2017 report on asthma in Baltimore, the Environmental Integrity Project found that the Black Butterfly is bearing the brunt of the city's asthma emergency room visits.⁹ The University of Maryland's Environmental Justice Screen Tool provides detailed, census-tract level data on pollution exposure and impacts, which can inform decisions about which areas to prioritize.¹⁰ Additionally, the Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative provides useful guidance on how to center environmental justice by guaranteeing that 40% of climate investments are directed toward the communities most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.¹¹

If Baltimore City is going to improve environmental health and build strong, resilient communities, it must take ambitious climate action. The goals outlined in this resolution are a good start and can help get Baltimore on a path toward a more sustainable future.

We urge a favorable report on 21-0075R with the suggested strengthening amendments and look forward to providing input on subsequent ordinances to bring this vision to fruition.

Sincerely,



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⁸Adrienne L. Hollis. (2021). [Net Zero, Gross Zero, Negative Zero. Simply Put, Which One Is Better?](#) The Chisholm Legacy Project.

⁹ Leah Kelly & Kira Burkhart. (2017). [Asthma and Air Pollution in Baltimore City](#). Environmental Integrity Project.

¹⁰ Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health Laboratory. (2017). [MDEJScreen](#). University of Maryland.

¹¹ Shalanda Young, Brenda Mallory & Gina McCarthy. (2021). [The Path to Achieving Justice40](#). The White House.

Suggested Amendments to 21-0075R

Throughout the resolution, change language from “carbon neutral” to “net zero” and “2050” to “2045.”

On page 2, in line 5, after “poverty” insert “Furthermore, it is imperative that these initiatives be implemented equitably with respect to these neighborhoods and communities that have historically borne the brunt of pollution and its associated health impacts.”