



**SB0151 Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights - Establishment**  
Presented to the Hon. Will Smith and the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
January 26, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

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**POSITION: SUPPORT**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue **a favorable report on SB0151 - Constitutional Amendment – Environmental Rights - Establishment**, sponsored by Senator Obie Patterson.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. There is mounting evidence that pollution and extreme weather conditions caused by climate change have adverse effects on reproductive health and access to reproductive healthcare services. [Communities of color](#) and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities are impacted most acutely. Classifying environmental rights as a constitutional right is a positive step forward to prevent exacerbating environmental damage and the effects of climate change on sexual and reproductive health and freedom.

Climate change is impacting reproductive health in various ways. Research has demonstrated the reproductive health outcomes associated with environmental pollution including infertility, abnormal menstruation and puberty, endometriosis, recurrent pregnancy loss, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), fetal death, prenatal growth abnormalities, reduced gestational period, low birth weight<sup>1</sup>, and genital and breast cancers.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, climate change's accelerating impact on global temperatures is making heat a more serious threat to pregnant persons going forward; exposure to unusually hot temperatures can lead to changes in length of gestation, birth weight, stillbirth rates, and neonatal stress.<sup>3</sup> Increased instances of natural disasters result in a disruption of reproductive health services which can lead to unplanned pregnancies; conversely, natural disasters can displace families and leave them financially unstable resulting in reduced fertility.<sup>4</sup> In both cases, individuals lose their reproductive freedom to choose when to become pregnant.

Environmental and reproductive rights are human rights; the intersection between these issues is especially apparent for communities of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. We welcome a constitutional amendment stating the unalienable right to a clean and healthy environment, which will prevent the state from causing or allowing further environmental degradation. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0151**. This amendment is a step in the right direction, but further action is required to ameliorate urban conditions which result in extreme heat, improve disaster preparedness considering the effects on reproductive healthcare access, and mitigate air, water, and soil pollution.

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<sup>1</sup> Rashtian, J., Chavkin, D.E. & Merhi, Z. (2019) Water and soil pollution as determinant of water and food quality/contamination and its impact on female fertility. *Reproductive Biology & Endocrinology* 17, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12958-018-0448-5>

<sup>2</sup> Bhatt, R.V. (2000). Environmental Influence on Reproductive Health. *International Journal for Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 70: 69-75. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292\(00\)00221-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(00)00221-6)

<sup>3</sup> Bekkar B, Pacheco S, Basu R, & DeNicola N. (2020). Association of Air Pollution and Heat Exposure with Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight, and Stillbirth in the US: A Systematic Review. *JAMA Network Open*; 3(6):e208243. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.8243

<sup>4</sup> Tobin-Gurley, J, Peek, L, & Loomis, J. (2011). Displaced Single Mothers in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 28, no. 2: 170-206.