



SB0674 – Environment - Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities - Reform

Presented to the Hon. Paul Pinsky and
Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 24, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to issue **a favorable report on SB0674 – Environment - Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities - Reform** sponsored by Senator Sarah Elfreth.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. In doing so, we recognize that human health is intimately tied to environmental conditions, and a substantial body of evidence has identified the threats environmental toxicants and extreme heat pose to reproductive health and fetal development. Low-income communities and people of color are [disproportionately impacted](#) by the adverse reproductive health consequences of climate change, which is why these communities should have a prominent voice in the Commission.

Racial minorities are more likely to be exposed to [air pollution](#), live near [toxic sites and landfills](#), [drink contaminated water](#), and have elevated levels of [lead in their blood](#). Research has demonstrated the reproductive health outcomes associated with environmental pollution include infertility, abnormal menstruation and puberty, endometriosis, recurrent pregnancy loss, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), fetal death, prenatal growth abnormalities, reduced gestational period, low birth weight,¹ pregnancy-induced hypertension and preeclampsia,² and genital and breast cancers.³ Additionally, people of color in Maryland are more likely to live in areas with [limited green space](#) to mitigate extreme heat. Rising global temperatures is making heat a more serious threat to pregnant persons going forward; exposure to unusually high temperatures can lead to changes in length of gestation, birth weight, stillbirth rates, and neonatal stress.⁴ These health outcomes can cause enduring mental and physical trauma to pregnant persons and the infants they deliver. Substantial research has shown that low birth weight infants may be more at risk for many health problems; some may become sick in the first six days of life or develop infections, others can suffer from long

¹ Rashtian, J. et al. "Water and soil pollution as determinant of water and food quality/contamination and its impact on female fertility." *Reprod Biol Endocrinol* 17, 5 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12958-018-0448-5>

² Wang, A et al. "Environmental influences on reproductive health: the importance of chemical exposures." *Fertility and sterility* vol. 106,4 (2016): 905-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2016.07.1076>

³ Bhatt, R.V. "Environmental Influence on Reproductive Health." *International Journal for Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 70: (2000) 69-75. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292\(00\)00221-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(00)00221-6)

⁴ Bekkar B, et al. "Association of Air Pollution and Heat Exposure With Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight, and Stillbirth in the US: A Systematic Review." *JAMA Netw Open*. (2020); 3(6):e208243. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.8243

term problems such as delayed motor skills and social development or learning disabilities.⁵ Furthermore, 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.⁶ In both cases, individuals lose their reproductive freedom to choose when to become pregnant.

Historical environmental racism and economic inequality are major factors in the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color and low-income folks. Dr. Robert Bullard, a founder of the environmental justice movement notes “one of the key components in environmental justice is getting people to the table to speak for themselves.” This bill seeks to bring the people most impacted by environmental injustice issues to the Commission so that their concerns and needs can be met.

For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0674 with the proposed amendments by Maryland League of Conservation Voters.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reproductive and Birth Outcomes and the Environment. Retrieved <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/showRbBirthOutcomeEnv>

⁶ Tobin-Gurley, J., et al. “Displaced single mothers in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: resource needs and resource acquisition.” *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*. (2010): 28, no. 2: 170-206