The 2023 legislative session heralded a new day in Maryland. Path-breaking environmental leaders were elected to the offices of Governor, Attorney General, and Comptroller and a third of the Maryland General Assembly took the oath of office for the first time in January (including 107 members endorsed by Maryland LCV). When the 90-day term ended at midnight on April 10, after the traditional marathon final day known as “Sine Die,” it marked yet another enormously successful legislative session for all who have worked to protect Maryland’s air, land, water, and communities.

The landmark Climate Solutions Now Act passed last year and it continued to be the focus for much of this year’s environmental legislation, as lawmakers sought pathways to meet the goals outlined in the 2022 bill. In particular, the bills prioritized by Maryland LCV that passed this session will facilitate implementation of the Climate Solutions Now Act by expanding renewable energy, reducing greenhouse gasses, and advancing environmental justice in our state agencies.

The many successes of this session reflect a partnership between Maryland LCV and the lawmakers — both legislative and executive — but also the partnership that we have with all our members and supporters. During the 2023 session, Maryland LCV held more than 100 meetings with legislators and allies and rallied thousands of our supporters to contact their legislators to urge passage of our priority environmental bills. Your voices are so critical to our success, and we are enormously grateful for your support and activism.

Following are environmental highlights from the 2023 legislative session.
Climate and Energy Policy

Maryland LCV is committed to ensuring strong, equitable implementation of statewide 100% clean energy policies to reduce the impacts of climate change and build economic opportunity in the clean energy sector. All of our priority climate and energy policy bills passed this session and, in doing so, set Maryland on an aggressive and strategic pathway to 100% clean energy by 2035.

- **Community Solar (HB908/SB613) Passed**
  Maryland’s Community Solar Energy Pilot Program develops small solar projects whereby households that are unable to have solar on their own roof can purchase affordable solar energy, expanding solar energy capacity and benefiting entire communities. This bill makes the pilot program permanent and makes important changes to better serve low- and-moderate-income subscribers.

- **Offshore Wind (HB793/SB781) Passed**
  Offshore wind is one of the most reliable clean energy resources available to Maryland. But for offshore wind to be an effective energy source, the energy it generates must be brought ashore. This bill creates the path to establish a coordinated transmission network, limiting ratepayer impact and building the resilience and reliability of the electric grid.

- **EmPOWER Reform (HB1035/SB905) Did Not Pass**
  The EmPOWER program has been an important tool for supporting improved energy efficiency in households across the state. This bill would have reformed the program to better align with state clean energy goals while adding important consumer protections and accessibility provisions. Despite strong efforts, the legislature ran out of time to move the bill to final passage.

Environmental Justice

Maryland LCV continues to push for comprehensive policy changes that will achieve environmental justice in the state, based on community-driven solutions. Maryland still falls short of that paradigm shift, but the 2023 legislative session delivered significant equity advances in public greenspace, as well as through transportation bills listed below.

- **Greenspace Equity (HB503/SB923) Passed**
  A Greenspace Equity Program will provide annual state funding to support projects, led by land trusts, local governments, and community partners that increase and enhance “community greenspace” in Maryland’s underserved and overburdened communities. Preserving, creating, and enhancing public community greenspaces will improve public health and livability for many communities across the state.

- **Climate & Environmental Equity (HB840/SB743) Did Not Pass**
  This bill would have enabled the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) to fully assess the health and environmental impacts of projects on marginalized communities and prioritize these communities for public protection. Importantly, it would have given MDE the authority to approve, alter, or deny a permit based on this assessment. The bill only passed out of one committee: Environment & Transportation. While this bill did not pass into law, it is the furthest a bill addressing the cumulative impacts of polluting facilities has ever advanced in Maryland. We are already taking steps to prepare the bill for success in the next legislative session.
Transportation

Transportation is the largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland. Transitioning to zero-emission electric vehicles and fueling them with clean energy sources is crucial to meeting Maryland’s clean energy and greenhouse gas emissions goals. The achievements made by the 2023 legislature and the Moore Administration jumpstart Maryland’s transition to zero-emission vehicles, advance our climate goals, and improve community health.

**Advanced Clean Truck Rule (HB230/SB224)**

Passed

This bill mandates Maryland to adopt the California-led standard that requires vehicle manufacturers to sell an increasing annual percentage of zero-emission medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, including electric trucks, delivery vans, and school buses in the state starting in 2027 (through 2035). This bill is of particular importance because communities of color and low-wealth communities often face disproportionate burdens from traffic and transportation pollution. In addition to this bill, Governor Moore’s HB550/SB548 (officially sponsored by the Speaker/President) provided financing support for this program, and he fulfilled a campaign promise by signing Maryland onto the parallel program, Clean Cars II.

**Transportation Equity Act (HB9/SB19)**

Passed

The Transportation Equity Act requires an analysis based on racial, disability, ethnic, and low-income disparities to be conducted and considered in transportation and transit funding decisions. Although this bill was passed during the 2022 session, it was vetoed by then Governor Hogan, so we are pleased it passed again this year and expect that Governor Moore will sign it into law.

**Budget allocation for Electric School Bus Transition**

Passed

In 2022, eight school districts across Maryland submitted applications to the federal electric school bus grant program, but only one school district received funds during this first round. With encouragement from Maryland LCV and Chispa Maryland, the General Assembly allocated $3 million to the Maryland Zero-Emission Vehicle School Bus Transition Grant Program to provide support for countries to begin the process of transitioning their school bus fleet from diesel to zero-emission electric school buses.

Land & Water Conservation

Land conservation is a simple defense against the impacts of climate change, including flooding, sea-level rise, and unprecedented species loss. The bills below will advance carbon sequestration, reduce flooding, protect water quality, and preserve essential habitat.

**Forest Conservation Act (HB723/SB526)**

Passed

This bill sets new, stronger statewide forest cover and tree canopy goals. It updates the existing Forest Conservation Act to give counties and local governments the flexibility to design a forest retention strategy that meets their local development priorities while providing stronger protections for areas determined to be priority forests. Advocates have been working towards this reform for at least five years.

**Maryland the Beautiful (HB631/SB470)**

Passed

The Maryland the Beautiful bill sets a conservation goal of 40% of Maryland lands permanently protected by 2040, while providing a plan and new tools to substantially and permanently protect Maryland’s most important lands. This bill puts Maryland on track to meet President Biden’s goal to conserve 30 percent of our nation’s lands and waters by 2030, and then to go even farther, fully embracing the importance of land conservation.

**PFAS in Pesticides Study (HB319/SB158)**

Passed

This bill requires the Department of Agriculture to study the use of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (known as PFAS or “forever chemicals”) in pesticides in Maryland, with a report of findings and recommendations to be delivered to the General Assembly by November 1, 2023.
What’s Next

The achievements of the 2023 legislative session are significant and put Maryland on a strong path toward 100% clean energy and truly equitable environmental policies.

Our work moving forward with the legislature and Moore Administration will focus on implementing the policies and programs recently passed, as well as working collaboratively with partners – both in the community and among elected officials – to build on these successes and identify the next steps towards our shared vision of a clean, just, equitable climate future. The voices of our supporters were powerful in the 2023 legislative session and will continue to be crucial to our success.