



As we look back on the session that was, Maryland LCV is reflecting on the progress and challenges of the ninety-day session that just concluded. The session began with a clear, united message from the Governor, Senate President, and Speaker of the House that affordability for Marylanders was their top issue. They stayed true to that goal and on the last day of session delivered a 100+ page bill that addressed the issue of energy affordability. We supported their goal and worked with both chambers to inject clean energy – the least expensive and fastest to deploy form of energy – into the bill and defended energy efficiency where we could. We were disappointed that the CHERISH Act did not pass, although the depth of debate and conversation about environmental justice was unprecedented. Another disappointment was the Transportation Climate Alignment Act. While progress was made and the bill was very close to passing this year, it did not make it inside the deadline. We were very pleased that the 2027 Budget bill included over \$400M for climate programs as well as stable funding for agencies.

Maryland LCV is proud of our work and especially proud of the engagement of our members. We lobbied legislators directly, held a Lobby Day with over 60 of our members participating, supported a public information event about key legislative priorities, and facilitated over 4,400 messages from our members to their legislators that conveyed the message that environmental protection and justice are key priorities for Marylanders.

Key Legislation

The Utility RELIEF Act (HB 1532 / SB 841)

Maryland LCV started the 2026 session with a “Power Maryland Forward” agenda. Energy bills are too high, and the solutions lie in a combination of clean energy deployment, energy assistance, and utility accountability. Harmful pollution from the electricity sector accounts for almost 20% of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions. There is a risk of increasing this pollution due to the passage of last year’s Next Generation Energy Act and the fact it created a fast-track permitting lane for gas plants. Additionally, there is an anticipated rise in electricity demand from large load users such as data centers.

Throughout the session, we focused on advancing energy affordability. We supported the deployment of solar and storage, getting the most out of the electricity grid we have through utilization of advanced transmission technologies, and fought against more fossil fuels and unchecked utility profits.

The legislation we supported through this agenda – Affordable Solar Act (HB 345/SB 341), Streamlining Residential Solar (HB 1104), Utility Transparency & Accountability (HB 1/SB 2), Lower Bills and Local Power Act (HB 897/SB 386), Advanced Transmission Technologies (HB 40/SB 201), and Data Center Demand Response (HB 940/SB 596) – were all or partially incorporated into the Utility RELIEF Act. The Utility RELIEF Act ultimately encompassed all or part of at least 18 bills introduced this session, becoming the largest omnibus bill in memory for the General Assembly. With any bill that large, there are components that we support and components that do not fully align with our mission of a healthy environment for everyone in Maryland.

Furthermore, the process to get to a final bill this broad has its flaws and issues with clarity and transparency. That said, this bill makes important investments in clean energy programs, puts some important guardrails in place for data centers, lays the groundwork for important utility accountability measures, and bolsters the electricity grid we have. At the same time, it pauses goals for the state's energy efficiency programs – one of the best returns on investment we have.

The Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) (HB 1040)

As part of our effort to ensure our environmental agencies and programs are adequately funded, Maryland LCV championed legislation to mandate minimum funding from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) to support critical programs. This two-pronged strategy involved both working on the FY2027 budget, as well as a bill that would have mandated at least \$365 million from the SEIF for the intended programs of reducing emissions and supporting renewable energy.



One of the key issues Maryland LCV had been championing for inclusion in the bill – mandated minimum funding for climate programs was passed in the House, but does not appear in the final version. In the 2027 budget, our goals were achieved, with the General Assembly directing an additional almost \$100 million above the Governor's initial budget. The long-term legislative mandate was among the 18 bills that were rolled into the Utility RELIEF Act, and we were heartened by its inclusion in the bill that passed out of the House on crossover. Sadly, that language does not appear in the bill being sent to the Governor's desk.

Transportation and Climate Alignment Act (HB 437 / SB 59)

In addition to being the state's largest source of climate emissions, transportation is the second largest expense for most Maryland families. The Transportation & Climate Alignment Act (TCA) required the Department of Transportation to measure the greenhouse gas emissions of all major transportation projects and align the state's transportation budget with Maryland's climate goals. In addition to improving air quality by reducing vehicle emissions, the bill ensured that more Marylanders would have access to more affordable, accessible, and sustainable transportation options, especially in overburdened and underserved communities. The TCA passed the House and failed in the Senate for the third straight year, due to opposition misinformation and delay tactics, as well as many other significant bills being considered in the last few hours of the session.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (HB 1287 / SB 780 & HB 126 / SB 781)

This year was the second year the CHERISH Our Communities Act, a community-driven environmental justice bill addressing the cumulative impacts of environmental pollution, was introduced. While it was the second iteration of this bill, it's been more than a decade since

the first cumulative impacts bill was introduced in Maryland in 2014, with little progress on legislative actions to address pollution burden in communities across the state since then.

Maryland doesn't have explicit authority to make permit decisions based on environmental justice considerations like these. Permits are considered one at a time, without evaluating the total, or cumulative, impact of surrounding permitted facilities or the socioeconomic status of nearby communities.



Since the end of the 2025 session, the Mid Atlantic Justice Coalition (MAJC) has worked closely with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) on a bill that would make a meaningful impact, while respecting some of the fiscal constraints the state is under. MAJC also spearheaded advocacy efforts on the CHERISH Act, which was a Maryland LCV priority, an environmental community priority, and gained notable support from Governor Moore and legislative leadership, with \$1.2M allocated in the budget for the implementation of the bill. Unfortunately, as the support grew, so did the opposition. Industry lobbyists showed up in force to make the case that additional pollution controls for facilities in overburdened communities would be too costly, and the chance that a permit would be denied because of its disproportionate adverse impacts introduces too much uncertainty for businesses in Maryland. With leadership from the bill sponsors, the bill hearings went well against the backdrop of industry pressure, but ultimately, the bill hit too many hurdles. There continues to be relatively broad support for environmental justice conceptually, but legislation needed to change permitting systems repeatedly fails to pass in Maryland.

Protecting Democracy

Strong environmental policy is only possible in a democracy where all eligible voters are allowed to participate in free and fair elections. With the weakening in recent years of federal policies, the Maryland General Assembly has taken steps to improve access to voting and protect against policies that would reduce representation. This year, the legislature passed critical legislation that would automatically restore voter registration for formerly incarcerated citizens on release from detention (SB 241 / HB 115), and, in the last minute of the session, passed a Maryland Voting Rights Act (SB 255 / HB 350) that ensures that voters, especially in predominantly minority districts, have the option to elect candidates from their communities, ensuring a legislature that more closely reflects the people of Maryland. Both of these bills are a result of years of efforts by advocates and legislative champions.

A Watered Down Year for Land and Water

Few significant new policies for water or land conservation made it through this year of the General Assembly. One such bill that did, HB 925 (Sewage Sludge - Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances [PFAS] - Regulation), will place strict limits on the level of “forever” chemical contamination in the sewage sludge, or biosolids, spread on farm fields as a fertilizer. This bill helps to address a concerning source of forever chemical contamination in the environment. While we were pleased this bill passed, a companion bill to address sources of PFAS in consumer products was unsuccessful.

Legislation to codify the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program into law (HB 1599 / SB 0558) also moved forward. The program ensures the Maryland Department of Transportation annually transfers funds from the Transportation Trust Fund to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) based upon an established formula, with recognition of potential harm caused to oyster reefs as a result of dredging operations to maintain the Port of Baltimore. While more oysters in the Bay is always a good thing, the bill’s language restricts MD DNR from utilizing funds for oyster restoration. This may be an issue that needs revisiting in the future to allow MD DNR the same flexibility with the funding it had prior to this legislation.

Looking Ahead: 2026 Elections

The Importance of Voting For A Better Maryland

The 2026 legislative session marks the last of a four-year term for members of the General Assembly before most return to ask voters to let them continue to serve. Each election year, Maryland LCV works to identify and support the strongest candidates to effectively advance strong, just environmental policy, but it is the voters who play the most important role in ensuring the future of our state. The decisions made in the voting booth inspire community leaders to become champions for their districts, bringing visionary new ideas to the State House. This year’s legislative priorities show the importance of elections. All of Maryland LCV’s top legislative priorities were sponsored by candidates supported by Maryland LCV in their elections. Our champions range from one of the youngest and newest members of the General Assembly to multi-term veterans. Since the last election, we have seen issues of energy and data centers come to the forefront of the conversations, and a state budget that is facing shortfalls year-over-year. It will be critical that our leaders have the grounding in the needs of their communities to make smart decisions on our future - and elections are the best tool to do that.



See our latest list of endorsements at mdlcv.org/endorsements. More are on the way. Make a plan to vote; Primary Day is June 23!



**MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS**