



For Immediate Release: March 6, 2018

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The Delaware Riverkeeper Testifies about Constitutional Amendment before Maryland Senate Committee

Annapolis, MD – Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN), testified in front of the Senate Committee on Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs about a proposed environmental constitutional amendment on Tuesday.

“It is exciting to be in this moment when Maryland is looking to protect the right to a healthy environment in the same way we protect other fundamental rights, like the right to free speech, freedom of religion and property rights,” said van Rossum. “We all need clean water, clean air, healthy foods grown in healthy soils, and healthy environments to sustain every aspect of our lives, including sustaining jobs and economies, so it only makes sense to give environmental rights the same protection we give these other rights we hold dear.”

The proposed amendment, sponsored by Senator Bobby Zirkin, would guarantee the right to clean air, pure water, and healthy communities. The amendment reads in part, “Every person has the right to clean air, pure water, healthy communities, an environment free of the conditions that degrade public health or natural resources, and preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment.” This amendment would be placed in the Declaration of Rights section of the Maryland Constitution, placing it alongside other rights such as the right to free speech and private property rights.

Maya van Rossum is author of the book *The Green Amendment: Securing our Right to a Healthy Environment*, which focuses on the power and importance of constitutional recognition and protection of environmental rights, and was a lead petitioner in the 2013 case that that breathed legal life into Pennsylvania’s environmental rights provision.

She testified to the committee about the importance of constitutional protection of environmental rights, as well as about the benefits to development, industry, and business. She also used her expertise on constitutional environmental amendments to make suggestions such as strengthening the language to make the provision self-executing. Her testimony also discussed how a constitutional amendment is more effective than current environmental laws at protecting environmental rights and how the citizens of Maryland will benefit from an environmental constitutional amendment.

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