

STEPHANIE SMITH
Legislative District 45
Baltimore City

HOUSE PARLIAMENTARIAN

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Chair, Education and Economic
Development

Oversight Committee on Pensions

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families

House Chair
Baltimore City Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 314
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3486 · 301-858-3486
800-492-7122 Ext. 3486
Stephanie.Smith@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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STATEMENT OF MARYLAND DELEGATE STEPHANIE SMITH (D-45)
U.S. Senate Budget Committee Hearing

Good morning, Chairman Whitehouse, Ranking Member Grassley and distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and share the concerns of my constituents.

I am Delegate Stephanie Smith and I proudly represent Maryland's 45th State Legislative District in Baltimore City. In the Maryland General Assembly, I serve on the House Appropriations Committee, Chair the Education and Economic Development Subcommittee and also Chair the Baltimore City House Delegation. Outside of my work as a legislator, I have spent my career at the intersection of environmental health, urban planning and community development. Today, I will share observations about the public health costs of climate change from both my professional lens and the lived experiences of my neighbors.

Baltimore's average temperature has risen 3 degrees over the last century—nearly twice as much as the nation at-large. Beyond overall increases in average temperature, Baltimore is one of the leading US cities for the urban heat island effect. Urban heat islands are hyperlocal pockets of elevated temperatures within a city that can exacerbate adverse health outcomes for residents with diabetes, cardiovascular conditions and respiratory health challenges. A concentration of paved surfaces, buildings and industrial activities amplify rising temperatures. Baltimore's urban heat islands make our city the 9th hottest urban hot zone in the United States. Residents inside Baltimore's urban heat islands are more likely to: be people of color, have lower-incomes, and live shorter lives.

My district is home to landmarks like Pennsylvania Station and Johns Hopkins Medical Center as well as communities that have faced the policy harm of redlining and disinvestment. The Northeast communities at the top of my district are comprised of yards, mature trees and boast significant green spaces like Herring Run Park. However, I live at the bottom of my district in East Baltimore which is home to dense rowhome neighborhoods with the hottest temperatures in Baltimore City.

As climate change delivers more extreme heat days, Baltimore is on pace to see a six-fold increase in these very hot days in the next 15 years. In East Baltimore communities like Madison-Eastend and McElderry Park, this can mean more emergency medical calls for chronic conditions. As the heat index approaches 103 degrees, emergency calls for congestive heart failure can double.

I personally live in a 123-year-old, rehabbed rowhome with my husband, young sons and my mother who has a chronic heart condition. Thankfully, our home has central air conditioning that can maintain her comfort on the hottest days. All my neighbors deserve to live with the dignity and baseline resilience needed to survive extreme heat.

Unfortunately, news [reports](#) have detailed some of the difficulties my neighbors face as extreme heat days multiply:

- Row homes trap heat, which is a benefit in the winter, but poses significant harm in the summer. In July 2019, the University of Maryland put sensors inside of McElderry Park homes and recorded interior temperatures as high as 97 degrees with a heat index of 119 degrees.
- Parents keep children confined in the hot homes or do not install window air conditioning units on the first floor due to concerns about public safety.
- Tammy Jackson in McElderry Park laments the interior temperature of 92 degrees on a 100-degree day. With asthmatic grandchildren, Jackson doesn't know where to find relief. She simply exclaims "This is too much. Lord, this is too much."

Yes, the scope of this challenge can feel like it is "too much." But I do have good news to share, while climate change continues to increase temperatures, there are investments we can make at every level of government including:

- Increasing urban tree canopy,
- Prioritizing green roofs and surfaces in construction,
- Providing more accessibility to cooling centers and
- Proactively reaching out to our most vulnerable community members during Code Red days.

While this problem is enormous and mitigating the adverse health impacts of extreme heat can mean cost savings from:

- Reduced Medicaid claims,
- Reduced emergency medical care for the uninsured, and
- Increased economic productivity from improved healthiness.

The state of Maryland through our Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 invested in 5 million urban tree plantings and encouraged green infrastructure but we will need local, state and federal strategies and investments to blunt the aggressive harm extreme heat poses to urban centers.