

To: MaryPIRG Foundation

From: Margie Omero  
Momentum Analysis

Re: Recent polling in Maryland

Date: February 1, 2005

This memo is based on a survey of 684 likely voters in Maryland. Interviews were conducted by telephone January 25-27, 2005. Random Digit Dial (RDD) sample was used, and voters were screened to be registered voters and likely 2006 general election voters. We conducted oversamples in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George's County. For the purposes of this memo, the regions examined are: Anne Arundel/Howard Counties, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County. Between 100 and 103 interviews were conducted in each of these regions, each with a margin of error of +/- 9.8. For brevity and clarity, all other counties are grouped together into an "other" region. While we conducted 684 interviews overall, this memo reports a weighted representative sample of 600 interviews. The margin of error for the sample overall is +/-3.7.

Our recent survey of Maryland voters clearly shows strong support for the reasoning behind the Clean Cars Act (or LEV II), as well as for the specifics. Not only do voters support increased government regulations of auto manufacturers, but they are willing to put their own money on the line in order to reduce emissions. Improving the health and air quality of Marylanders is the chief reason to support the Clean Cars Act. Further, legislative candidates who oppose the Clean Cars Act could face repercussions. Across the board, our results are consistent and strong. Indeed, while there are differences across region, gender, and partisan groupings, support for the Clean Cars act extends across demographic lines.

### **Voters identify cars as the biggest source of air pollution, and do not feel that auto manufacturers are doing all they can**

Respondents accurately sense that car emissions contribute a great deal toward the state's air pollution. A clear majority (62%) suppose that cars are the biggest source of air pollution in Maryland, with "industrial facilities and factories" a distant second (22%). There is a clear distinction here by region. Voters in Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and other counties are far more likely to fault cars (78%, 67%, 68%, respectively) than are voters in Anne Arundel/Howard, Baltimore County, or Baltimore City (53%, 53%, 43%, respectively).

Similarly, when asked what percentage of Maryland's air pollution is due to cars, respondents, on average, guess 49%. Women guess a bit higher (51%) than do men (47%).

Not only do voters see cars as most of the pollution problem, they clearly observe that auto manufacturers are not doing what they can to reduce emissions. Nearly three-fourths (71%) say that auto manufacturers “currently have the technology to make cars that have lower emissions.” Only a fifth (20%) say they “will have the technology soon.” Barely any voters (5%) feel auto manufacturers are far away from this technology. More than eight in ten (81%) in Anne Arundel & Howard Counties and over three-fourths (77%) in Montgomery County sense that this technology is available, although strong majorities agree across the state (70% Prince George’s, 69% Baltimore County, 67% other regions, 63% Baltimore City).

Given the widespread belief that cleaner technology is available, it is not surprising that voters feel auto manufacturers can do more. Three-fourths (76%) say that manufacturers are “not doing enough to reduce car and truck emissions.” Only a fifth (21%) feel they are doing the right amount. Barely any (2%) feel they are doing too much. Two-thirds of Republicans (68%) say auto manufacturers are not doing enough, compared to 72% of independents and 82% of Democrats. There is not much difference across regions on this question.

Indeed, the vast majority of voters feel that government regulations are necessary to make auto manufacturers work to reduce emissions. More than eight in ten (82%) agree with the statement: “auto manufacturers would only work to reduce emissions if government regulations required them to.” Far fewer (15%) agreed with the statement “auto manufacturers would work to reduce emissions on their own, without government regulations forcing them to.” With such a strong response, subgroups only vary by degree. Three-fourths (76%) of Republicans, 80% of independents and 86% of Democrats agree that government regulations are necessary to make auto manufacturers work to reduce emissions. Voters in Anne Arundel/Howard Counties and Montgomery County are most likely to feel regulations are necessary (86% for each).

Recall that in the previous section we saw that the influence of big business over environmental regulations, and the failure of government officials to act on environmental problems were among voters’ top concerns. Our results specifically on auto manufacturers and emissions are consistent: regulations are necessary, and overdue.

### **There is wide support for clean cars standards**

The Clean Cars Act, also known as the Low Emission Vehicle (LEV II) clean cars standards, receives broad and deep support from Maryland voters. A majority (53%) strongly favor the standards. Nearly eight in ten (79%) favor the standards either strongly, not so strongly, or are undecided but lean toward favor. Women are a bit more likely to support the standards (83%) than are men (74% favor), but there is no significant difference across regional lines. While support varies across party lines, support transcends partisanship. Two-thirds (67%) of Republicans and 70% of independents favor the clean car standards. A full 90% of Democrats support the standards.

## **Consumers are clearly willing to pay slightly more for a cleaner car**

Opponents argue that the new standards would put an onerous burden on auto manufacturers to sell a fixed percentage of hybrid and cleaner conventional cars. But our respondents reveal a car market that can easily meet these requirements. More specifically, our voters overwhelmingly volunteer that they are willing to pay a small amount to reduce pollution, or a larger amount to increase gas mileage.

Whether the amount is \$300 or \$100, voters are very willing to pay more for a cleaner conventional car that pollutes less (89%, 92%, respectively). These results extend across every subgroup we tested.

Two-thirds of voters (66%) say gas mileage will be “very important” the next time they purchase a car, and an additional 26% say it is “somewhat important.” So when the option is paying even more up front with the promise of improved gas mileage, voters continue to be interested. More than eight in ten (85%) say they would pay \$1000 more for a car if they knew they could make up the difference in fuel savings over four years.

Interest in a hybrid car is a bit weaker, but still strong overall. A fourth (25%) said they would “very seriously consider” a hybrid for their next car purchase. Further, another 44% say they “might” consider a hybrid. A majority (56%) of voters say they would be willing to spend an extra \$3000 on a hybrid if they knew they could make up most or all of the difference in fuel savings over the life of the car.

## **People in MD strongly feel that more needs to be done to protect the environment**

Maryland voters identify themselves as environmentalists, and are concerned both generally about the state’s environment, and specifically about a variety of environmental problems. When asked how well the word “environmentalist” describes them, respondents on average rate themselves a 7 on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means “does not describe me at all” and 10 means “describes me perfectly.” There are only minor differences across subgroups. Democrats and independents each, on average, rate themselves as a 7 on this scale, and Republicans rate themselves a 6. There is also little variation across the state, with Baltimore City ranking highest (mean: 7), and Prince George’s County ranking lowest (mean: 6).

When we turn toward describing the quality of the environment in Maryland, respondents are not very positive. A majority (58%) say the environment in the state is either “only fair” or “poor.” Four times as many voters feel the environment in Maryland is poor (12%) as feel it is excellent (3%).

Similarly, respondents are more pessimistic than optimistic when thinking about the future of the state’s environment. While about half (47%) suppose the environment’s quality is staying the same, nearly twice as many sense it is getting worse (32%) as opposed to better (17%).

We also asked respondents about a series of specific issues about the environment and environmental regulations, and asked them how concerned they were about each. Voters expressed most concern about protecting the Bay (“We are not doing enough to protect the Chesapeake Bay:” 81% concerned). But large numbers were also concerned about the influence of businesses and the failure of elected officials to act. Eight in ten (79%) said they were concerned that “big industries such as auto-makers and oil companies have too much influence over environmental politics.” About three-fourths (73%) showed concern that “our elected officials are not doing enough to address the problem of global warming.”

Indeed, majorities were concerned about every issue in our list, except for those items that addressed too much environmental regulation. Fewer than half (45%) showed concern that “strict government regulations to supposedly improve our environment will cost me too much money.” And more than a third (37%) are concerned that “environmental regulations put too much restriction on businesses.”

### **Health benefits are the primary reason to support the Clean Cars Act**

Respondents found our reasons to support the Clean Cars Act compelling, that is, either “somewhat” or “very” convincing as a reason to support the Act. By far, however, the most compelling dealt with public health. An argument focusing on increases in cancer and asthma rates is quite compelling (85% net convincing). Similarly, an argument on the smog and toxin levels in the air in Maryland is also persuasive (79%).

Other arguments are also compelling, albeit a bit less so. Describing the popularity of hybrids is convincing to three-fourths (76%) of voters. This is not surprising, since we’ve seen above that many Marylanders are themselves interested in purchasing hybrid cars. That hybrids cost \$3000, which can often be recouped because of better gas mileage, is a compelling argument (74%). Importantly, lobbying by auto manufacturers against the Act is a compelling reason to support the Act (60%).