FROM THE DIRECTOR
DEAR MEMBER

The efforts of Maryland PIRG staff, members and allies in the past year resulted in major victories to protect Maryland families and firefighters from exposure to toxic PFAS “forever chemicals,” and a comprehensive state climate policy to reduce the pollution that harms our health and the planet. In this report, you can learn more about the research, advocacy and grassroots action that made a positive difference in people’s lives on these issues and many others.

We carry out our mission in a state that can be a national leader in setting an example of strong bipartisan action. We are finding opportunities to do good—to bring people together, find common ground, and solve problems that affect all of us. We’re grateful to each of our members, volunteers, donors, friends and supporters like you, who make it possible for us to do all we can to advance the public interest. It is truly our privilege to get to do this work together.

Emily Scarr
State Director

MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

“I pledged my support to PIRG 30 years ago or so because I want my children and grandchildren to have the benefits of clean air, water and overall environment. I see daily reminders of how much damage we have done and know that fixing that damage starts with me.”

Matt C.V., Member

“PIRG keeps me informed. A variety of topics are covered from individual changes I can make to larger government issues that I can at least sign letters of concern. I greatly appreciate PIRG for fighting for a safer, healthier world.”

Helen M., Member

Photos: (Cover) PIRG’s Nathan Proctor speaks to the media about our Right to Repair campaign. (Left) Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr meets with lawmakers. Credits: (Cover) Leise Jones Photography. (Left) Staff. (Above) Photo courtesy of Matt C.V.
ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
BEYOND PLASTIC
We urged companies to reduce plastic

Many Americans are trying to reduce their plastic use, but it’s difficult when nearly everything comes packaged in plastic. Through our Beyond Plastic campaign, PIRG supporters sent more than 70,000 petitions to Whole Foods, Costco, Amazon and General Mills in 2022, urging them to phase out single-use plastic packaging. And in September, General Mills’ shareholders passed a resolution telling the company to reduce its use of plastic packaging.

Our state partner groups also played a key role in winning producer responsibility laws in California and Colorado, which will hold plastic packaging producers responsible for dealing with the waste their products create.

Photos: (Above) PIRG’s Beyond Plastic team shined a spotlight on the problem of plastic waste in the media, while our coalition partners released a scorecard ranking corporations on their plastics policies. Credits: (Left) STEKLO via Shutterstock. (Above, clockwise) Staff; Liam Louis, Elle Vignette Photography; As You Sow.
ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
TOXICS & PESTICIDES
We reduced toxic threats putting our health at risk

At the start of 2022, Maryland PIRG Foundation released a report detailing how PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) put our health at risk. Found in a wide variety of products, PFAS have been linked to serious health effects, including cancer.

Maryland PIRG advocated for the George “Walter” Taylor Act, named for a 31-year veteran of the fire service who died from cancer linked to PFAS exposure. The bipartisan bill was signed into law in April, and will restrict PFAS chemicals in food packaging and carpeting, switch to safer alternatives for firefighting foams, and require notification for firefighter turnout gear that contains PFAS.

Photos: (Left) PIRG’s Deirdre Cummings announces the launch of our campaign to ban toxic PFAS chemicals at a press conference. (Above) Maryland PIRG’s Emily Scarr and staff build support for getting PFAS out of outdoor gear and firefighting foams. Credits: (Left) Leise Jones Photography. (Above, clockwise from top right) Staff; Airman First Class Amber Powell; Staff.
We defended consumers in the marketplace

In 2022, our Right to Repair campaign made it easier for Americans to fix their stuff. After U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s reports gave Apple an “F” on smartphone repairability and exposed how John Deere restricts farmers’ ability to repair their tractors, both companies announced they would make improvements.

Following a series of high-profile air travel debacles, PIRG provided tip guides to help travelers know their rights and understand how to get refunds for canceled flights.

And since the PIRG-backed No Surprises Act went into effect at the start of 2022, the new law is already preventing 1 million surprise medical bills every month.

Photos: (Left) PIRG Right to Repair Campaign Senior Director Nathan Proctor testifies before a congressional subcommittee for our right to repair the things we own. (Above) PIRG’s Teresa Murray alerts the public to consumer threats, while PIRG’s R.J. Cross helps consumers protect their data. Credits: (Left) Yazan Aboushi. (Above, clockwise) CBS; SynthEx via Shutterstock; Fox 13.
In October, a report from our research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund found that most grocery chains reviewed failed to address antibiotics overuse. PIRG supporters sent more than 17,000 petitions to Trader Joe’s, urging the grocer to eliminate the routine use of antibiotics in its private-label meat supply.

In May, President Biden signed the PIRG-backed Safe Sleep for Babies Act into law to ban infant sleepers due to the risk of suffocation. And the 2022 edition of the “Trouble In Toyland” report warned parents about the risks of smart toys that gather children’s data, increasing the chances that it will be exposed in a hack.

As evidence mounted that gas stove pollution is toxic to our health, PIRG worked to get Americans the information they need to keep their families safe. Our supporters sent 5,000 petitions urging Best Buy to inform its customers about the risks, and we got the word out through events and in media.
The PIRG-backed bipartisan infrastructure bill passed at the end of 2021 included $5 billion in funding for electric school buses over the next five years. In 2022, PIRG worked to raise awareness about this program and urged states to make full use of this funding to give kids a cleaner, healthier ride to school.

After winning the federal No Surprises Act, PIRG’s Patricia Kelmar worked to make sure that the final rules implemented were as strong as possible in 2022. PIRG urged the Biden administration to stand firm to protect patients and avoid accelerating the rise of health care costs.

In April, U.S. PIRG Education Fund released an interactive map confirming widespread lead contamination of school drinking water. In states with the most data, half of all schools tested contained at least one lead-contaminated tap. PIRG staff and supporters urged officials to quickly get the lead out.
Maryland PIRG is part of a federation of independent, state-based, citizen funded Public Interest Research Groups. Together, we have a long legacy of victories in the public interest—including state and local wins that have provided blueprints for action nationwide.

1971: First PIRGs founded
Students start the first college campus chapters of Minnesota PIRG, Missouri PIRG and Oregon Student PIRG. PIRGs form in 20 more states over the next decade, and U.S. PIRG is founded in 1983.

1982: MASSPIRG saves the Bottle Bill
After winning a 9-year campaign to pass the Bottle Bill, MASSPIRG faced a new challenge: an industry attempt to repeal it. More than 8,000 citizen volunteers got to work, ultimately helping to defeat the repeal with a convincing 59% of the vote.

1984: PIRG hits student voter registration milestone
PIRG’s newly launched National Student Campaign for Voter Registration registers 750,000 student voters in its first year, increasing the registration of 18- to 24-year-old voters by 17%.

1986: PIRG wins drinking water protections
PIRG plays a key role in passing strong new federal Safe Drinking Water Act amendments to better protect groundwater sources of drinking water and increase the pace at which contaminants are regulated.

PIRG’s first annual “Trouble in Toyland” report is released, warning parents of the hidden dangers of certain toys on the market. U.S. PIRG Education Fund has since published 36 other reports, resulting in more than 150 recalls.

1989: MASSPIRG wins law to reduce toxics
MASSPIRG authors and wins the passage of the Toxics Use Reduction Act, requiring industries to publicly disclose their use of toxic chemicals for the first time and plan for future reductions.

Photos: (Above, left to right) MASSPIRG’s Mindy Lubber and Doug Phelps promote the Massachusetts Bottle Bill in 1981; PIRG’s Lucinda Sikes speaks to the media about toy safety; Tufts University students show support for Massachusetts’ hazardous waste initiative. Credits: Staff; staff; staff.
1998: PIRG wins reduction of pesticides in schools
CALPIRG, MASSPIRG and Maryland PIRG help win a series of laws to reduce the use of pesticides linked to cancer and other serious health problems in public schools throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

2010: PIRG helps create CFPB
PIRG co-founds a coalition that, alongside U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, wins the creation of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Since opening its doors in 2011, the CFPB has helped return $16 billion in relief for consumers.

2012: PIRG helps win national clean car standards
Following years of advocacy by the state PIRGs, the Obama administration implements new national clean car standards calling for the average mile-per-gallon standard across the U.S. fleet of cars to hit 54.5 by 2025.

2014: California bans single-use plastic bags
After building support in cities and counties, CALPIRG helps pass the nation’s first statewide ban on single-use plastic bags in California. Ten more states follow suit over the next decade.

2015: Tyson Foods announces antibiotics phase-out
PIRG helps convince the nation’s largest poultry producer, Tyson Foods, to commit to no longer using medically important antibiotics in their chicken, paving the way for other corporations to follow suit.

2018: PIRG helps win free credit freezes for consumers
In the wake of several high profile data breaches, including at credit bureau Equifax, PIRG helps pass a federal bill ensuring access to free credit freezes for all consumers to help prevent damage from identify theft.
We need to support groups like PIRG who are keeping a close eye on what is happening (or not happening) legislatively and letting us know how to respond to harmful policies.

Cathy J., Member