



A working group sponsored by Glen Echo Heights Mobilization (GEHM)
4901 Brookeway Drive
Bethesda, MD 20816

Committee: House Appropriations Committee
Testimony on: (HB 1295), Public School Construction – School District Energy Use Policy and Study (“School District Energy Policy” bill)
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 10, 2020

Last year, we formed a working group sponsored by Glen Echo Heights Mobilization with support from the Sierra Club Climate Parents with the goals supporting our local school district, MCPS, to achieve and sustain 100% clean energy. In undertaking these efforts, we have been collaborating with officials from MCPS, the School Board, Montgomery County Government, MoCo Students for the Climate, MCCPTA, The Climate Mobilization, 350, Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, and others.

While working on this issue in Montgomery County, we conducted a state-wide inventory of school district energy policies across the 24 counties in Maryland. In doing so, we learned that:

- **School districts are commonly the largest energy consumers in counties across Maryland** – larger than county governments. This means that they are also among the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions from the heating and cooling on their numerous buildings to the fossil fuels for the fleet of their school buses.
- **Most (but not all) school districts have energy policies, but these are often outdated.** Some date back to the 1970s, others to the early 2000s. Many such energy policies consist of a simple statement such as: “The Board of Education believes it to be our responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to conserve energy and natural resources while exercising sound financial management.” Some also specify that all staff and students have roles as “energy savers,” with some including detailed guidelines on heating and cooling temperatures, energy saver equipment, and so forth. With one exception, none of the school districts have targets for shifting to renewable energy sources or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The exception is Baltimore City Schools’ Sustainability Plan, which does include a strategy for purchasing energy from renewable resources and metrics for monitoring the share of electricity from renewables. However, data on specific monitoring indicators have not been reported in the time since 2017 when the strategy was adopted.
- **Moreover, even in counties where the county government has adopted targets for renewable energy or greenhouse gas emissions reductions, the school districts are exempt from such targets.** Given that school districts own the properties for their school buildings autonomously from county governments, they are typically exempt from such county policies. The state of Maryland cannot meet its targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions unless they include school buildings and fleets in their policies.

- **School districts are not monitoring energy use or efficiency in a systematic way.** To date, there is no standardized template for monitoring and reporting on energy use, efficiency per square foot, or the share of energy consumption from renewables across school districts. Such data are critical for establishing targets and monitoring efficiency.

As such, we strongly support adoption of this “School District Energy Policy” Bill (HB 1295) which would support the following measures.

- The bill would make approval of school construction projects by the Interagency Commission contingent upon school districts adopting or updating their energy policies
- Such energy policies would include monitoring and reporting on total energy use, energy efficiency, and renewable energy use.
- The bill would also require the Interagency Commission on School Construction to coordinate with the Maryland Energy Administration and the Clean Energy Center to study and make recommendations on how to expand and provide funding for the Maryland Net Zero Energy Schools Initiative.
- While the bill does not contain specific requirements for renewable energy use or greenhouse gas reduction, it is a first step toward that end, and one that is both meaningful and politically viable.
- Importantly, by focusing on energy policy, monitoring, reporting, and assessments, the bill does not impose direct financial burdens the state budget or on school districts. Rather, improved energy efficiency resulting from more strategic and renewable energy could also help school districts save on spending outlays.

Conclusion

This bill is a modest but critical first step in moving towards establishing targets for renewable energy use and greenhouse gas reductions in school districts across the state of Maryland. It ensures that such school districts will update and adopt modern energy policies; monitor and report on energy use, efficiency and renewable sources; and assess options for expanding the Maryland Net Zero Schools Initiative. While it refrains from imposing additional demands on school or state budgets, it can also lead to significant savings through improved efficiency. It is a win-win-win for Maryland. We urge a favorable report by this Committee.

Liz Feldman, Group Lead/Climate Activist
MCPS Clean Energy Campaign/GEHM
lizolfefeldman@gmail.com
301-706-5365

Kathy Lindert, Volunteer Activist
MCPS Clean Energy Campaign/GEHM
kat_lin3@yahoo.com
202-870-2785