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March 21st, 2023
The House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Ben Barnes
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill 235 - School Buildings - Solar and Geothermal Technology

Dear Chairman Barnes and members of the Committee,

Over the past decade, there has been a considerable increase in the development and use of green technologies. Solar panels in particular have become more commonplace. Furthermore, as the use of this technology has become more prevalent, its cost has diminished.

One issue triggered by the increased use of solar panels is where they should be located – on prime agricultural land or on the roofs of large buildings.

The genesis of this bill occurred three summers ago, when I was invited to an event at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium to celebrate the completion of a project of installing solar panels on the roof of the Cow Palace. The Cow Palace is a huge building with a very large, flat roof. I learned that a solar company had initiated contact with the management of the Fairgrounds and had inquired if the Fairgrounds would permit the company to install solar panels on the roof of the Cow Palace. The company advised that the Fairgrounds would not have to pay any money at all for the solar panel installation. Moreover, on account of the electricity generated by the solar panels and then uploaded onto the electrical grid, the Fairgrounds would receive the benefits of a portion of that electricity and consequently would pay less for its electricity and, over time, would save well over a million dollars on its electrical bill.

Like the Cow Palace, modern schools have flat roofs which sprawl over wide expanses. Thanks to the “Built to Learn Act”, Maryland counties as well as Baltimore City are going to construct lots of schools over the course of the next decade.

In light of the opportunity presented, Senate Bill 235 states that for each school constructed in Maryland from July, 2025 to June, 2034, the local school system responsible for the school construction must consider installing solar panels on the roof of the school. The bill does not impose a mandate requiring solar panels to be installed, merely a requirement that the local school systems consider installing solar panels. The caveat is that if a local school system elects not to install solar panels, it must submit an explanation to the State Commission on School Construction. The bill then provides that the IAC must in turn submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the State Senate and the Speaker of the House listing the school construction projects in each jurisdiction as to which the local school system decided not to

install solar panels, including the rationale provided by the local school system as to why the decision was made not to install the panels.

Senate Bill 235 and the cross file, House Bill 300 thus will gently nudge the local school systems to consider the efficacy of installing solar panels on school roofs. I believe that if they take a hard look at solar panels, they will conclude that the installation of solar panels will save the new school a lot of money over the decades. The installation of solar panels on these prominent government structures instead of on prime agricultural land will redound to the benefit of the State for many decades to come.

This bill also passed the Senate unanimously.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 235 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.