

Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: SB 0235 - "School Buildings – Solar and Geothermal Technology"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Oppose

Hearing Date: March 21, 2023



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to SB 0235, which concerns approaches for the Interagency on School Construction (IAC) to consider for solar and geothermal installation on schools. Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan.

The time is right for solar and geothermal installation in schools. The Climate Solutions Now Act passed last session provides additional funds to build net zero schools, which often did not pencil out due to solar costs. The Inflation Reduction Act also allows tax-exempt organizations, like schools, to take advantage of solar tax credits and grants are coming soon for EPA's clean schools program. And then there is innovative financing like participation in demand response programs, alternative school financing, power purchase agreements, and community solar, all of which schools can examine. However, this bill does not lead us down the path.

Our first concern is with MD. Education Code Ann. § 5-319 (d), that the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) **MAY** adopt regulations. Admittedly it is probably more realistic since when the General Assembly enacted § 5-319 (a) as it currently exists the IAC was told that they **SHALL** enact regulations concerning solar on schools and have yet to finalize a rulemaking. Prior to that the Board of Public Works was responsible for finalizing regulations under Maryland law and they also do not appear to have issued any rulemakings to address solar reporting from schools. What would make the most sense is to leave the statute alone and hold the IAC accountable for the regulations they shall implement under the direction of the General Assembly.

The one positive direction being undertaken is that this bill does include requirements to examine geothermal in addition to solar. Geothermal heat pumps have been found to be a cost effective heating and cooling solution in nearly all of the new buildings that PGCPS is constructing and this is proving to be less expensive when long-term costs are considered and, of course, produces no on-site emissions, which is better for the health of the students and the planet.

Our second concern is the addition of MD. Education Code Ann. § 5-319 (b), that school construction cannot be held up if the evaluations are not done. This is short-sighted and will lead to long-term locking in of unevaluated decisions. LEAs will build schools without considering the federal and state tax rebates and other funding available to them for solar, net-zero, and geothermal and cost the taxpayers more in the long-term, and then there will be the costs to replace inappropriate heating and cooling systems to meet 2045 carbon reduction goals.

We can attest through our work with PGCPS that these requirements will lead our school construction to a better place for both the environment and the taxpayer. Letting the IAC and some LEAs off the hook for

requiring long-term evaluations of cost saving measures will cost Maryland taxpayers more in energy costs and result in costly retrofits to achieve the zero emission goals of the Climate Solutions Now Act.

Our tax dollars should be going towards education, not wasted energy and the IAC should be required to follow directions from the General Assembly under Maryland Law.

We encourage a report **OPPOSING** this legislation.