



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Budget and Taxation

Testimony on: SB235 “School Buildings – Solar Technology – Solar Panels on Schools”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 1, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB235, which provides that Maryland school systems that construct new schools between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2034 must consider whether to include solar panels on the school rooftops and, if a school system decides not to include solar panels for a particular school, it must provide an explanation to the Interagency Commission on School Construction.

Last year, the General Assembly established ambitious climate goals for Maryland in the Climate Solutions Now Act, including reducing the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2031 (compared to the 2006 level) and achieving net-zero emissions by 2045. In order to meet these goals, it is imperative that Maryland significantly increase its generation of clean energy, including solar and offshore wind.

Schools can play an important role in this effort. By placing solar panels on school rooftops, school systems can be symbolic leaders in their communities to encourage solar expansion, including solar panels on residential and commercial rooftops, community solar, and utility-scale solar. In addition, solar panels on school rooftops may serve as a tangible example and learning experience for students, as they learn about the energy sector transformation needed to mitigate climate change.

This bill will ensure that school systems carefully consider whether to include solar in their school construction plans. One of the challenges in expanding rooftop solar is that the rooftop in question must be of a sufficient quality (e.g., it is not economical to place solar on an aging rooftop where, in a few years, the panels would need to be removed to repair the roof and then reinstalled). Another issue is that the rooftop must not be shaded, and should be oriented in a direction that maximizes exposure to the sun. Accordingly, an ideal time to include solar panels for a school is when the school is initially being built, when the rooftop will be new and the buildings can be designed to maximize the rooftop solar exposure.

We appreciate that one provision of the bill is that the Interagency Commission will be required to publish a list of schools built during the covered time period without solar panels, together with the explanations provided by the school districts for why solar panels were not included. This may provide valuable feedback to identify any obstacles to including solar panels in schools, which in turn may help identify solutions or work-arounds.

At the front end, when school systems are considering whether to include solar panels, it would be helpful for the bill to also promote a degree of transparency, so that school communities can provide input on this important decision. We encourage the sponsor to consider an appropriate amendment in this regard.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on this bill.

Mark Posner
Clean Energy Team Lead
mposner5719@gmail.com

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org