

Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB169 –Public Utilities – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs – Energy Performance Targets and Low-Income Housing
Organization: Individual
Submitting: Deborah Cohn, Bethesda, MD
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 2, 2023

Dear Chairman Wilson and Committee Members:

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of HB904.

Improving energy efficiency is a proven, cost-effective way to reduce carbon emissions and lower home energy costs. Since 2008, when the EmPOWER program was first enacted, it has contributed materially to both of these objectives.

Low-income households, however, have been left behind. They often fail to qualify for EmPOWER advisory services and rebates because their homes need health and safety remediation, including dealing with lead, mold, asbestos problems or leaky roofs, before they can qualify. Few have been able to make the investments needed to increase energy efficiency. Consequently, low-income Maryland residents spend 13% of their income on energy, compared with 8% for low-income families nationwide. My family's experience supports this. Transitioning in an older house from a gas furnace and water heater to heat pumps required asbestos remediation, and other improvements required mold remediation that included very expensive foundation repair. I understand how the cost of repairs needed to qualify for EmPOWER and similar funds excludes low-income residents from reducing their energy demand and utility costs.

HB169 is a first step in addressing these problems. It calls for:

- Setting goals for incremental energy savings.
- Establishing regulations to ensure that the benefits of weatherization assistance for rental properties accrue primarily to low-income tenants.
- The Department of Housing & Community Development to submit to the Public Service Commission (a) plans for achieving the energy-efficiency goals, including funding sources, and (b) semi-annual progress reports.
- The Public Service Commission to collaborate with the Department in carrying out its plans, including securing cooperation from electric companies.
- The Department to collaborate with a new Green and Healthy Task Force charged with delivering green and healthy housing for low-income residents, determining the resources needed for this purpose, and developing recommendations for overcoming the barriers to the availability of healthy, energy-efficient, affordable housing.

Energy efficiency has already saved Maryland consumers billions of dollars and reduced air pollution. HB169 ensures that the state addresses the needs of low-income households, who

have received little benefit from the state's energy efficiency efforts. As a matter of basic equity and fairness, we must not leave them behind.

For these reasons, I urge a **FAVORABLE** report for HB904 in committee.