



Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB169 “Public Utilities – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs – Energy Performance Targets and Low–Income Housing”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 28, 2023

The Chesapeake Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility supports HB169, as an important step in addressing energy inequity and increasing energy justice. A core focus of HB169 is to increase access and effectiveness for low-income households of the state’s energy efficiency and conservation programs aimed at reducing energy use and energy burden: the EmPOWER Maryland program, the Multifamily Energy Efficiency and Housing Affordability Program, and the Weatherization Assistance Program. These programs are currently underproducing in terms of actual impact on the families who most need to benefit from them. For example, only 17.5% of residential spending under EmPOWER is used for low-income residents. The program is meant to be cost effective for families by issuing rebates and other benefits, but currently low-income households pay almost twice as much into the EmPOWER program as they receive.

HB169 sets specific targets for energy reduction for low-income residents, along with requirements for a 3-year plan, with semi-annual reporting on plan implementation and annual reporting on program effectiveness (number of households served, energy savings, and funding availability) by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

The bill includes additional protections and requirements including –

- For renters, requirement that interventions supported by the programs actually help the low-income residents, along with protection from rent increases or eviction when rented properties are improved by program investment;
- Priority for contractors who are women-, minority-, or veteran-owned, and inclusion of fair labor standards for work done under the programs;
- Requirements for use of multiple funding sources, including coordination of benefits and available funds for low-income household energy efficiency and conservation from all federal sources.

Finally, the bill establishes a multi-departmental “Green and Healthy Task Force” to assess program coordination, resource availability, and opportunities for strengthening the state’s energy efficiency and conservation programs for low-income communities.

HB169 reflects thorough understanding of the state’s present programs, the opportunities for improvement in serving low-income families, appropriate mechanisms of coordination, and establishing transparency.

The earlier version of this bill was passed by the previous legislature, only to be vetoed by the former governor.

We strongly urge the committee to issue a favorable report, with the expectation that this legislature will once again pass this important bill.

Respectfully,

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Physicians for Social Responsibility is a national organization of doctors and other health professionals dedicated to averting two overarching threats to human health and well-being: nuclear weapons and climate change. PSR is a component of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which received the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize.