



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

Testimony on SB0613/HB908 - Electricity - Community Solar Energy Generating Systems Program

Hearing Date: Feb 28, 2023

Bill Sponsor: Senators Brooks, Feldman, M. Washington, King, Kramer, Zucker, and Elfreth

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Submitting: Liz Feighner for Howard County Climate Action

Position: Favorable

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing more than 1,400 subscribers. It is also a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#).

Howard County Climate Action enthusiastically supports [SB0613/HB908](#), as our organization has been promoting community solar to our members ever since the program became available in 2017. Community solar helps build stronger communities and fight climate change while saving money for ratepayers. Community solar offers the benefit of solar to those who can't or don't want to install solar panels on their homes. This program provides equal access to all Marylanders to clean renewable energy.

Originally a pilot program, community solar legislation has benefitted all Marylanders, including low-to-moderate income (LMI) households. The pilot program currently requires 30% of its subscribers to be in the LMI category (including 10% of the 30% being low-income). This bill would not only make the program permanent, but the program will require ALL Community Solar projects going forward to have at least 40% of subscribers in the LMI category. (This is consistent with the Biden administration's "Justice 40" strategy.)

This bill would make community solar a permanent program, while adding improvements to the existing pilot program. Requiring all projects to reserve at least 40% of their created energy for low-and-moderate income households addresses the equity issue. Another major improvement is the inclusion of utility consolidated billing, meaning a single utility bill. Consolidated billing is essential for expanding access to community solar, especially for those on energy assistance. Without this change, subscribers need a checking account or credit card. Those who pay cash for their utilities bills or are on energy assistance are locked out of the program. Maryland already allows consolidated billing for third party retail energy suppliers, and this legislation corrects that inequity for community solar.

By making community solar a permanent program, Maryland will have another tool for meeting the state's 2030 solar and 2031 greenhouse gas reduction targets.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for SB0613/HB908.

Howard County Climate Action

Submitted by Liz Feighner, Steering and Advocacy Committee

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