



**HoCoClimateAction.org**  
Howard County, Maryland

**HB0397 - Public Utilities – Thermal Energy Network Systems – Authorization and Establishment (Working for Accessible Renewable Maryland Thermal Heat (WARMTH) Act)**

**Hearing Date: February 22, 2024**

**Bill Sponsor: Delegate Charkoudian**

**Committee: Economics Matters Committee**

**Submitting: Ruth White for HoCo Climate Action**

**Position: Favorable**

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing approximately 1,400 subscribers. It is also a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#). We urge you **to support HB0397, Warmth Act**, which provides an opportunity to pilot networked geothermal systems in Maryland.

Pilots established by The Warmth Act will aid in programs to decarbonize buildings, a path begun by commitments under the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022. In addition, Governor Moore has ongoing commitments to decarbonization through: (1) the Maryland Climate Plan: [Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan: Policies to Reduce Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions 60% by 2031 and Create a Path to Net-Zero by 2045](#); (2) recent pledge in the [Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management](#) to (along with 8 other states) set goal for heat pumps to meet at least 65% of residential-scale heating, air conditioning and water heating shipments by 2030 and 90% by 2040; and (3) [announcement February 9th to spend \\$90 million](#) on reducing carbon pollution in Maryland with \$50 million toward decarbonizing community buildings including multifamily housing.

Under the WARMTH ACT, utilities will submit plans for pilots for thermal energy networks systems (often called networked geothermal) to the Public Service Commission. These pilots will be in distinct neighborhoods to show the feasibility of replacing gas with large thermal (geothermal) systems providing heat and air conditioning on a neighborhood basis. This technology is already used by Maryland university systems and more. The pilots will demonstrate how decarbonization can work by replacing all necessary appliance upgrades, home retrofits and panel upgrades. The pilot provides for collaboration by cities, counties or community organizations at the neighborhood level, so all in the neighborhood are engaged and see the benefit of the projects.

These pilots will: (1) make strategic use of IRA funds; (2) demonstrate effective means of electrifying everything in homes one neighborhood at a time; (3) provide proven, community-scale change which is seen already in systems in use across the country, systems which are already providing savings for institutions and residents; (4) focus on neighborhoods with 80% low- and moderate-income residents and will prioritize overburdened and underserved communities.

For all these reasons, and many more others will submit in their testimony, we support this bill, envisioning these pilots as providing a key vision for strategic and effective, rapid expansion of heat pump technology and decarbonization of our buildings.

We urge your favorable vote for HB0397.

Howard County Climate Action

Submitted by Ruth White, Steering and Advocacy Committee

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