



**Committee:** Economic Matters  
**Testimony on:** HB0397-Working for Accessible Renewable Maryland Thermal Heat (WARMTH) Act  
**Organization:** Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing  
**Submitting:** Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** February 22, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB0397. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of nearly 30 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB0397.

Maryland has a statutory requirement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 60% of 2006 levels by 2031. Once this milestone is achieved, we are further required to transition to a net-zero economy by 2045. Meeting these targets is urgent and imperative, and both solar and wind projects are behind schedule in meeting those targets. Under the RPS, geothermal is listed as contributing only 1% of MD's energy needs compared with the 14.% for solar and 2.5% for wind. Maryland's path to achieving its GHG reduction goals is so narrow and has so many favorable (and perhaps unrealistic) assumptions that it really is important to overachieve in some areas. Networked geothermal systems are a super efficient, inflation resistant, reliable way to heat and cool buildings. These systems can be constructed today. They are an already proven, carbon-free technology. They minimize additional electric demand on the grid.

Geothermal heat pumps (GHPs) have been available since the 1940's, and are significantly more efficient than air-source heat pumps. The U.S. Department of Energy [estimates](#) that GHPs reduce energy consumption and emissions by up to 44% compared to air-source heat pumps and 72% compared to standard air-conditioning equipment. However, individual GHPs are significantly more expensive than other choices, though they can pay back that extra cost in 5 to 10 years. By networking a neighborhood, savings result from sharing the costs of the boreholes and also sharing waste heat generated in local businesses (primarily from refrigeration and other cooling required year-round, including data centers).

**Problem:** While geothermal heat pumps are a well-tested technology, and their use in districts, such as universities, is proliferating, their use in networked systems to heat small neighborhoods is more recent. Ensuring an equitable transition for residents and businesses in the impacted neighborhood and for affected gas utility workers also needs careful planning.

**Solution:** HB0397 would create pilot projects and gather experience and data to assess how well networked geothermal systems will work in different areas in Maryland.

Maryland would not be the first state to pilot thermal energy networked systems using geothermal heat pumps. Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota and New York have passed laws that allow or mandate gas utilities to undertake thermal energy network pilot projects. Illinois, Maine, Vermont and Washington are exploring similar laws.

For example, Eversource, a Massachusetts gas utility, is well-along to completing a networked [geothermal pilot in Framingham](#), consisting of 32 residential and 5 commercial buildings and 140 customers, including a community college, public housing authority, and a fire station.

Maryland should follow the lead of these forward-thinking states and implement a networked geothermal pilot program by passing HB0397. The MLC Climate Justice Wing strongly supports HB0397 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.

350MoCo

Adat Shalom Climate Action

Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry

Chesapeake Earth Holders

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Climate Parents of Prince George's

Climate Reality Project

ClimateXChange – Rebuild Maryland Coalition

Coming Clean Network, Union of Concerned Scientists

DoTheMostGood Montgomery County

Echotopia

Elders Climate Action

Fix Maryland Rail

Glen Echo Heights Mobilization

Greenbelt Climate Action Network

HoCoClimateAction

IndivisibleHoCoMD

Maryland Legislative Coalition

Mobilize Frederick

Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

Montgomery Countryside Alliance

Mountain Maryland Movement

Nuclear Information & Resource Service

Progressive Maryland

Safe & Healthy Playing Fields

Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

The Climate Mobilization MoCo Chapter

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

WISE