



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 7, 2024

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Bill: SB 1054 – Local Government – Building Permits for Residential Solar Energy and Residential Energy Storage – Required Platform and Inspections

Position: Unfavorable

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League opposes Senate Bill 1054, which mandates every local jurisdiction adopt the SolarAPP+ platform to permit residential solar installations, requires they allow remote inspections, codifies an absurd deemed-approved clause, and includes unnecessary penalties.

The League believes it would be short-sighted to require the use of a single piece of software. While it is nice that SolarAPP+ is free today, there is no guarantee that it will remain free or operational indefinitely.

The legislation also requires ALL jurisdictions to implement the SolarAPP+ platform rather than just those that currently permit residential solar. Historically, a county holds that responsibility in municipalities until a city or town develops their own program. It is unclear how many municipalities are currently permitting residential solar, but it's likely many do not have the staff to comply with the requirements of the bill.

SB 1054 further requires acceptance of video or photo inspection of installations and considers them deemed approved within 10-days if an inspection is not reviewed/completed by the jurisdiction. Together, these provisions present a danger to the homeowner or community in attached dwellings.

According to our members, remote inspections are supposed to be an alternative not the standard. There is no way to properly verify if the connection is secured, or that the amperage is correct with remote inspections. This could potentially result in a life/public safety issue.



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

Municipal inspectors work to ensure the life, safety and welfare of their residents, not to allow solar panel installation companies to cut corners and speed through a process, especially because doing so could cause severe injury or even death to residents and loss of property.

Finally, the legislation includes potentially substantial penalties for non-compliance of an alternative permitting and inspection structure. We are not aware of a similar penalty provision for what is essentially a permitting preference. In totality, one of our legislative committee members defined the industry-heavy approach of this bill as “draconian.”

According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory’s 2022 Annual Performance Review of SolarAPP+, the platform saved just 13 businesses days vs. traditional methods. If it’s a good program, local governments will pick it up with MEA support. MML will even share the opportunity for funding and support through our network. But, to mandate it for every jurisdiction – with some of these dangerous provisions included – hardly seems worth projects being completed 13 days sooner.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 1054.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns

Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.

Bill Jorch

Justin Fiore

Chief Executive Officer

Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs

Director, Public Policy & Research

Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs