

Monday, March 4, 2024

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Mariana Rosales, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Climate

POSITION: Support SB 1023 Maryland Building Performance Standards – Fossil Fuel Use, Energy Conservation, and Electric– and Solar–Ready Standards (Better Buildings Act of 2024)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 1023 offered by Senators Brooks, Lewis Young, and Lam. SB 1023 will require new homes and buildings to incorporate the most energy-efficient equipment, safety standards, clean air equipment, and effective insulation. It aims to provide lasting cost savings, health benefits, and climate resilience to generations of residents without increasing the cost to build. This bill is consistent with Maryland’s Building Energy Transition Plan developed by the Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC). One of the four core recommendations in this plan is that, “The General Assembly should require the Maryland Building Code Administration to adopt a code that ensures that new buildings meet all water and space heating demand without the use of fossil fuels,” and further states that these requirements should include that all new buildings “are ready for solar, electric vehicle charging, and building-grid interaction. This code shall apply to all new residential, commercial, and state-funded buildings beginning as early as possible but no later than 2024.”

TNC, as a member of the Mitigation Working Group and the Buildings Sub-Group, provided funding for the Maryland Building Decarbonization Study, which supported the MCCC’s Building Energy Transition Plan. This study modeled three potential building decarbonization scenarios and made recommendations for Maryland to achieve deep decarbonization of building end-uses by mid-century, while also analyzing the costs and benefits of each potential pathway. One conclusion from this study was that “All-electric new construction is found to be less expensive considering both equipment and fuel costs than those connecting to gas grid and using fuels for heating.”

According to the state’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, buildings sector emissions accounted for approximately 16.6 percent of the state’s total greenhouse gas emissions in 2020. This is the third largest emissions source in our state. The Building Energy Transition Plan is intended to serve as a roadmap for reaching net-zero emissions from residential and commercial buildings by 2045, consistent with the state’s commitments under the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022. SB 1023 offers a cost-effective method to put the MCCC’s recommendations into action in order to set Maryland on a clear path toward significant buildings sector emissions reductions that aligns with our commitments.

TNC commends Senators Brooks, Lewis Young, and Lam on putting forward this bill, which aims to implement the MCCC’s building decarbonization recommendations in order to achieve our climate goals, while also reducing consumers’ costs, providing long-term health benefits, and promoting new construction that is resilient to extreme weather and increasing energy demands.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 1023.