



2714 Hudson Street  
Baltimore, MD 21224-4716  
P: 410-534-6447  
F: 410-534-6475  
[www.ghhi.org](http://www.ghhi.org)

February 19, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
3 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **FAVORABLE** – SB958 – Responding to Emergency Needs From Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act of 2024

Dear Chairmen Feldman and Beidle and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), I submit our testimony in support of the RENEW Act of 2024 (SB958). GHHI is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit headquartered in Baltimore, MD. Our mission is to address the social determinants of health, opportunity and racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe and climate resilient homes. SB958 will generate resources to mitigate climate change and its impact at scale in Maryland and provide immediate benefits to disadvantaged communities served through this initiative.

GHHI is the nation's lead authority on the benefits of a whole-house approach that aligns, braids and coordinates energy efficiency, health and safety to create an integrated home repair and retrofit delivery model to improve health, economic and social outcomes in line with the state's climate goals. The GHHI model has been supported by the US Department of Energy and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development as well as numerous states, cities and counties throughout the US. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI's work aims to eradicate the negative impact of historic disinvestment, the legacy of ill-conceived and unjust housing by creating holistically healthy housing for children, seniors and families in Maryland's low wealth communities. As GHHI's President and CEO, I serve on the Maryland Clean Energy Center Board, NESCAUM's Advisory Board and the EPA Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee among others. I oversee a number of related GHHI DOE, HUD and EPA funded programs and our organization's work has been recognized through national best practice awards from the EPA and HUD. In 2023, GHHI was awarded the Buildings Upgrade Prize award from the U.S. Department of Energy in recognition of its proposed initiative to complete electrification of low-income households in East Baltimore through a community-driven, whole home initiative with health and safety, workforce and efficiency benefits.

The Need for Increased Program Funding To Mitigate Further Climate Change and Address the Impacts of Extreme Weather in Maryland

To achieve the goals of the Climate Solutions Now Act and the Maryland Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, the state must generate new revenue sources to more aggressively increase the pace and the scale of programs that reduce carbon emissions. Fossil fuel businesses need to contribute their fair share for the consequences that fossil fuel consumption has on climate change and not place the responsibility for rebuilding our infrastructure solely on the state and our taxpayers. GHHI supports the legislation’s creation of the Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation Fund to fund increased electrification and decarbonization programs at scale while improving the resiliency of Maryland’s housing stock and its local communities to endure more frequent, extreme weather conditions. SB958’s generation of billions of dollars in additional funding for climate change mitigation, housing resiliency initiatives, reductions in energy demand and infrastructure improvements is the type of bold action needed in Maryland.

Concentrating Resources on Under-resourced Communities and Those Disproportionately Affected by Climate Impacts

To ensure that vulnerable families and communities in Maryland have the tools and resources to improve their home’s resiliency, prevent negative health outcomes and undertake energy efficiency, electrification and decarbonization measures, the Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation Fund must support the significant expansion of critical programs such as: MEA Energy Efficiency Equity and Solar Energy Equity Grant Programs, the Maryland DHCD Whole Home Program, MDDHCD weatherization and energy efficiency programs, and MDH Regional Partnership Catalytic (Asthma) Grant Programs among others. A whole house approach and increased resources for these programs are needed to address underlying hazards and structural defects and prevent deferrals of otherwise eligible low income families from receiving housing intervention services. Substantial increased funding is needed to meet the demand in overburdened communities for clean energy options for those who face high energy burdens, health disparities and a lack of access to new energy technologies. Roofing repair and replacement, proper gutters, downspouts and drainage, adequate ventilation, and functioning heating and cooling systems are necessary to make homes more resilient to the frequency of extreme weather and heat that Maryland is encountering. By setting a minimum allocation of 40% of the Fund’s resources being dedicated to low income communities that are often most impacted by climate change, SB958 ensures that the state will pursue an equitable strategy.

Impact of Climate Change and Extreme Weather - Unhealthy and Energy Inefficient Housing

Determinants of health related to air quality and indoor and outdoor environments are known to be significant contributing causes of asthma morbidity and exacerbations and disproportionately burden populations, especially children and minorities. Extreme heat and cold and poor outdoor and indoor air quality contribute to asthma episodes for Maryland residents. Extreme weather can cause flooding and water infiltration in homes that are poorly weatherized that leads to unhealthy housing conditions such as mold, pests and other allergens. Extreme heat also creates higher energy burdens on low income housing that have significant energy loss from the lack of

weatherization and higher energy consumption from energy inefficient appliances that are forced to operate constantly to combat the higher temperatures.

Minority populations in Maryland are disproportionately impacted by unhealthy air and hazardous conditions that exist in their homes and communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The burden of asthma greatly contributes to inequities in health outcomes and health disparities especially for children in Maryland. Over 500,000 adults and children in Maryland have diagnosed asthma. Research has shown that race, ethnicity and income are common risk factors in asthma diagnoses and asthma episodes. African American asthmatics in Maryland visit the emergency room 5 times more often than White asthmatics and are hospitalized 2.7 times more often than White asthmatics. Many asthma episodes are preventable, yet high rates of asthma related emergency department visits and hospitalizations result in substantial medical costs for the state – including \$42.1 million annually for asthma related hospitalizations and \$93.3 million for asthma related ED visits. Recent analysis has also shown the significant contributions of fossil-fuel burning appliances on NOx emissions, which contribute to ozone and asthma hazards at a greater level than power plants in the state. Compared to white residents, people of color are exposed to 60% more pollution from residential gas appliances in Maryland.

Many homeowners in low income communities lack the financial resources to decarbonize and replace their gas burning appliances with safer and more energy efficient electric heat pumps, hot water heaters, stoves or dryers. Maryland needs to advance holistic, comprehensive solutions to improving air and water quality, increasing electrification and creating healthy, energy efficient and stable housing that improves health outcomes while reducing the effects of climate change. As Maryland works to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% from the 2006 baseline over the next eight years under Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, this Bill ensures that historically overburdened communities disproportionately impacted by climate change are at the forefront in receiving the maximum benefits available in this clean energy transition.

#### Benefits of providing resources in historical overburdened communities for clean energy, energy efficiency and sustainable housing

Maryland's state weatherization programs, and their energy efficiency and decarbonization interventions, provide direct energy benefits related to reductions in energy usage and utility bill costs. The programs also produce non-energy benefits as well such as greater financial and housing stability. Non-energy benefits are "the wider socio-economic outcomes that arise from energy efficiency improvement, aside from energy savings." Studies have shown that energy efficiency and weatherization can improve housing conditions relating to thermal comfort, indoor air quality, pest management, and fire safety among other benefits for low income households. Furthermore, household energy efficiency upgrades can help mitigate climate change, spur community benefits such as economic growth, neighborhood revitalization, and resilience. These investments can also support and stimulate the local economy in overburdened

communities by generating local green jobs that provide families and individuals with greater disposable income and purchasing power and help alleviate poverty (Bell 2014; IEA 2014).

Efforts to slow the pace of climate change and improve housing resiliency benefit the health, safety, and economy of the entire population. A healthy and energy efficient home yields a multitude of energy and non-energy benefits for Maryland residents, particularly low-income residents who can benefit the most from energy efficiency improvements in terms of economic mobility, housing stability and wealth attainment over the long-term.

By increasing the amount of state resources for climate mitigation and concentrating program services on historically underserved communities, this legislation will improve outcomes for climate, energy and health equity and housing stability. SB958 will improve housing conditions, advance energy efficiency and reduce climate impacts on Maryland's most vulnerable households - meeting the critical needs of Maryland families and seniors. I urge the Committee to support the passage of SB958.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Ann Norton', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ruth Ann Norton  
President and CEO