



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
OF MARYLAND

The Maryland Episcopal
Public Policy
Network

Testimony in Support of HB 1279

Better Buildings Act of 2024

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Hon. Marc Korman, Chair; Hon. Regina T. Boyce, Vice Chair; and the members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Rev. Ken Phelps, Jr., Director, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: March 4, 2024

The season of Lent calls the Church at this time to confess “our self-indulgent appetites and ways,” “our waste and pollution of God’s creation,” and “our lack of concern for those who come after us” (Ash Wednesday Liturgy, Book of Common Prayer, p. 268).

Lent is also the season of the prophets.

Prophecy is a critical response to the excesses of society. It is marked by its fierce commitment to humanity and speaks to the perception of potentialities and possibilities - both for good and evil - within the social structure. Prophets hold up the mirror of existence and force us to take a look, a hard, honest look at whom we really are and the conditions that we have created

The mirror never lies. The prophets were God’s inconvenient messengers. And when the activity of the people, or lack thereof - had moved the society to a tipping point, the prophets came with a warning about the wrath to come. Not the wrath of God, but the inescapable and often catastrophic consequences that were the product of their own doing. The warnings were dire, but they still carried with them the fleeting hope that if behaviors changed, disaster might be avoided.

Our collective histories reflect how often we have taken prophets’ messages to heart. Our mother is dying. Her prophets - speaking for decades now - have made that quite clear.



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The mirror never lies. Each of the last ten years has ranked among the globally hottest ten years ever recorded. Compared to the magnitude of the climate crisis that humans face, HB 1279 is a very modest policy bill even though this is not a time for incremental steps.

Maryland has statutorily committed to reaching net zero carbon pollution by 2045 – just 21 years from now. The Governor has recently advanced a comprehensive plan to make those required reductions with a necessary but large price tag. Why then allow new buildings to burn fossil fuels that directly spew carbon pollution into the air beyond the statutory net zero date. Why then allow buildings to waste electric energy that must be generated for the foreseeable future with at least some percentage of carbon-emitting fuels.

HB 1279 addresses both of those areas. After a reasonable transition period, the bill would disallow direct burning of fossil fuels for heat and hot water energy in most new buildings. It would also speed up the international model energy codes process to make new buildings more energy efficient, giving Maryland a better shot at reaching its 2045 targets. Passing the Better Buildings Act would entail little or no cost additional to the state.

Much of the text of HB 1279 is similar to the Climate Solutions Now Act as originally introduced in 2021 and passed in 2022. But the 2022 Climate Solutions Now Act's requirement that "new buildings meet all water and space heating demand without the use of fossil fuel" was dropped out of the bill in favor of a grid capacity study, which has shown that Maryland's utilities have plenty of capacity to accommodate new building electrification. HB 1279 would restore the language dropped out of the Climate Solutions Now Act in 2022 and add reasonable energy conservation, EV charging readiness, and solar readiness provisions that would move us more rapidly towards a 100% clean energy future.

Requiring new buildings to be largely fossil free has corollary benefits for Marylanders as well, in at least three ways:

- Avoiding fossil fuel heat and hot water appliances that vent to the outside would reduce outdoor air pollution, which is a serious health problem in densely populated areas and has significant environmental justice implications.
- New homes and buildings that avoid fossil fuel lines and appliances for cooking, while not required by the bill, would be much better indoor environments for the respiratory health of children and adults.
- Owners and tenants in new homes and buildings that avoid the enormous cost increases projected for the delivery of methane gas would enjoy significant savings on their ongoing fuel bills.



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We are grateful that the General Assembly has set high statutory climate goals and has required public and private plans to meet them. With a handful of other states and DC, Maryland stands out as a model and inspiration for other states and localities. There is no policy that makes more sense to achieve Maryland's climate goals while providing significant public health and economic benefits to consumers than electrifying and conserving energy in new construction.

We have an opportunity here. This is the appointed time for all God's children to work together for the common goal of renewing the earth as a hospitable abode for the flourishing of all life, not just human.

Our mother is dying. There may still be time to save her, but we must act swiftly and definitively to accomplish that goal.

We urge a favorable report.



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