



**Joint testimony on HB1279, The Better Buildings Act of 2024
 House Committee on Environment and Transportation
 March 6th, 2024
 Position: Strongly Support**

These 35 groups and coalitions, representing tens of thousands of Marylanders and perhaps more, urge the Committee to favorably report HB1279, the Better Buildings Act of 2024, introduced by Delegate Adrian Bofo and several cosponsors.

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, **HB1279 is a modest climate and health policy bill that really should not engender a lot of controversy.** 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 quite large price tag. **It makes no sense to make our challenge worse by allowing new buildings to burn fossil fuels that directly spew carbon pollution into the air beyond the statutory net zero date. Similarly, it makes no sense to allow buildings to waste electric energy that must be generated for the foreseeable future with at least some percentage of carbon-emitting fuels.**

SB1023 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 slow and uncertain model energy codes adoption process to make new buildings more energy efficient, giving Maryland a better shot at reaching its statutory 2045 carbon pollution reduction targets.

We want to strongly emphasize that passing the Better Buildings Act would bring significant climate, health, and cost-savings benefits to Marylanders with very little additional cost to the state. Perhaps it would require a small addition to the budget of the Building Codes Administration for consultants, although national energy codes experts who have analyzed the Better Buildings Act have concluded that almost no additional work would be needed, and there are ample federal and private resources available for technical assistance to the BCA staff. In fact the legislation explicitly authorizes the BCA to seek advice from the Department of Energy or the national energy labs.

The core idea of HB1279 is similar to HB831, introduced by Delegates Stein and Barve in 2022 and heard by this committee. It is also similar to the Climate Solutions Now Act as originally introduced in 2021 and eventually passed in 2022. The 2022 Climate Solutions Now Act's requirement that "new buildings meet all water and space heating demand without the use of fossil fuels" – the same language as HB831 – 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, and far more in addition. The General Assembly did, however, make a promise at that time that the Better Buildings Act manifests:

- (1) the General Assembly supports moving toward broader electrification of both existing buildings and new construction as a component of decarbonization; and*
- (2) it is the intent of the General Assembly that the State move toward broader electrification of both existing buildings and new construction on completion of the study required under subsection (b) of this section.*

HB1279 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:

- 1) 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.**
- 2) 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.**
- 3) 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.**

Architects, engineers, and energy policy experts will testify at the Committee's bill hearing that the electrification and energy saving policy steps required by HB1279 are cost-effective and achievable, despite what well-funded groups desperate to maintain the status quo would have you believe. Others will testify that electric heat pump technology has advanced rapidly and, with more than 25,000 models in the marketplace, is entirely capable of keeping people comfortable during the coldest parts of Maryland's winter and the hottest parts of Maryland's summer, with significantly reduced fuel costs and carbon emissions.

We are very 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 newly built buildings.** We implore the Committee to stand up to the naysayers and do everything possible to allow HB1279 to become law this year.