



Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB1279 The Better Buildings Act of 2024
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Monica O'Connor, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 6, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB1279, The Better Buildings Act of 2024. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of nearly 30 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB1279.

The Better Buildings Act does just what its name implies – it requires most new buildings to be built smart from the start, with better energy conservation and no on-site fossil fuel combustion for space and water heating. It has two substantive divisions: a section requiring electrification, EV-readiness, and solar readiness; and a section requiring substantial energy conservation in new buildings over 25,000 square feet, towards the goal of only renewable energy use.

HB1279 implements a simple vision of how we want our public and private buildings to be in the future – less expensive to operate, and much better for the climate crisis we face. It is a common sense bill that ensures that new construction utilizes highly efficient, cost effective electric appliances that are better for our health, our wallets and the climate.

By law, Maryland has just 21 years to reach net zero carbon pollution emissions as mandated in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022. Because buildings account for 13% of the state's polluting carbon emissions¹, it is impossible to meet these targets if we continue to utilize fossil fuels for space and water heating. Today's heat pumps are three to four times² more efficient than fossil fuel heating equipment, and remain two to three times more efficient even in winter weather. According to a report by the BDC³, the average heat pump sold uses as much as 29% less electricity during periods of peak demand than a central AC unit. Maryland Energy Administration states, "heat pumps are an essential tool to lowering monthly energy bills and keeping electricity demand low year-round." Tax credits and rebates made available by the Inflation Reduction Act have made efficient electric appliances more affordable for Marylanders in every income bracket. Across Maryland, 98% of households using high-efficiency electric appliances in place of fossil fuel heating

¹https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MWG_Buildings%20Ad%20Hoc%20Group/E3%20Maryland%20Building%20Decarbonization%20Study%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf

² <https://www.rewiringamerica.org/circuit-breakers-heat-pumps#3>

³ <https://buildingdecarb.org/resource/report-why-cooling-is-key>

equipment can save money on their monthly energy bills. The median low-income household in Maryland would save \$373 per year by replacing a gas furnace with an all-electric heat pump.⁴

The net effect of passing the Better Buildings Act would be to reduce carbon pollution emissions both directly (through onsite combustion) and indirectly (through electric generation), improve air quality, and substantially lower utility costs for homeowners and renters. To strengthen the bill, the Climate Justice Wing urges the committee to consider the prohibition of any fossil fuel appliances in the home, including gas stoves which have been shown to have significant negative health impacts.⁵

As Maryland transitions to a cleaner energy future, buildings using efficient electric heat pumps and heat pump water heaters will be cleaner, greener and less costly than those using methane gas or oil. Mandating that new construction be smart from the start is a common sense first step to reducing emissions from buildings. Therefore, we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for HB1279 in committee.

350MoCo

Adat Shalom Climate Action

Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry

Chesapeake Earth Holders

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Climate Parents of Prince George's

Climate Reality Project

ClimateXChange – Rebuild Maryland Coalition

Coming Clean Network, Union of Concerned Scientists

DoTheMostGood Montgomery County

Echotopia

Elders Climate Action

Fix Maryland Rail

Glen Echo Heights Mobilization

Greenbelt Climate Action Network

HoCoClimateAction

IndivisibleHoCoMD

Maryland Legislative Coalition

Mobilize Frederick

Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

Montgomery Countryside Alliance

Mountain Maryland Movement

Nuclear Information & Resource Service

Progressive Maryland

Safe & Healthy Playing Fields

Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

The Climate Mobilization MoCo Chapter

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

WISE

4

https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/ClimateChange/BETITF%20Meeting%20Materials/Understanding%20Residential%20Electrification%20Costs%20and%20Benefits_ReWire%20presentation%207.27.23.pdf

⁵ <https://news.stanford.edu/2022/01/27/rethinking-cooking-gas/>