

HB145_Weisman_Solel_FAV.pdf

Distinguished Committee Members and Representatives:

I am Rabbi Stephen Weisman, and since August of 2000 I have had the privilege of serving as the Rabbi and spiritual leader of Temple Solel, a Reform Jewish congregation and house of worship, located at 2901 Mitchellville Road in Bowie. We are the only recognized Jewish congregation in Bowie, and actually serve a geographic area significantly larger, including most of Prince George's County, significant portions of Anne Arundel County, even reaching across the Bay Bridge and into the southern counties of the state.

It is my privilege to write in favor of House Bill 145, the so-called "G.R.E.E.N. Bill." I wish my schedule allowed me to give testimony in person, as I was fortunate to do in the Senate a few years ago for an earlier version of this bill. But I am pleased to provide these written words in support of this important bill.

While I am aware that HB145 seeks to make funds available for all 501.c.3 tax exempt businesses and institutions to assist in the installation of alternative energy sources, I wish to focus my testimony on the world I know best, the world of houses of worship.

Outside of Montgomery County and Baltimore (city and county), with the exception of several megachurches, the vast majority of religious institutions in Maryland directly serving specific congregations, across religious lines, are relative small, and operate under limited budgets. This becomes truer each year, and was accelerated in the post-COVID world, as more people are finding individual paths to their own spirituality instead of seeking, and supporting, religious communities. For us, it is not a label, not a choice to run as "non-profit" organizations, it is an inescapable reality.

This is, at least for the moment, even truer of those of us Jewish congregations, who have also, over the last decade, with its rise in antisemitic behaviors and several high-profile armed attacks, been forced to use what limited, previously unassigned funds we had available for increased security for worship services, religious school, and other large events.

In the current reality of alternative, more environmentally sound, options for our energy consumption, tax exempt 501.c.3 organizations are left behind, as the nearly exclusive form of incentivization of such installations, to both individual homeowners and larger businesses, is through tax credits, which are of no use to us as tax-exempt entities. Combine that with our general lack of significant available disposable funds to cover the up-front costs of installation, and we are left without a viable path to becoming more responsible energy users.

Furthermore, our role as “moral exemplars” and role models, both to our member households and to our neighbors, cannot be fully recognized without us being able to “practice what we preach.”

Making funds available, in the form of interest-free loans, to 501.c.3 institutions, especially religious ones, is – if I have counted the “wins” correctly – a “win, win, win, win, win” situation. And the victories impact every part of our state, with no harm to anyone except the fossil fuel purveyors who, as a rule, have fought such efforts, rather than getting on board with them.

Congregations like ours win, both by being able, at last, to afford to install alternative energy solutions that are both better for our environment, and, in the long-term, will be less expensive for us to maintain and use, making us better citizens and better partners in leading our state and communities.

The state and its citizens win by lowering our collective carbon footprint, by gaining more effective role model partners in participating houses of worship, extending the influence and success of such efforts. In addition, this is one of the rare occasions when an act of our legislature truly will be an investment, not only in our institutions, but the future of our state, which will hopefully encourage future endeavors of similar significant value.

There may even be some fiscal benefits, in allowing available moneys today to be invested now, and returned at a future date, when they can be reinvested, or used better to alleviate real needs, rather than just needing to be spent on anything in the present for the sake of appearances and budgetary needs. And having more money available to spend on alternative energy sources will

encourage those who do this work for a living to continue to focus their efforts in Maryland, which can only be of additional benefit to us all.

For all these reasons, and many more, I urge you to pass HB145. Rarely has a single yes vote had the ability to do so much good for so many at such a small cost. Thank you for your time, and your commitment to the people of Maryland.