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Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Vice Chair
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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Senator Ron Watson's Testimony for SB 818

Education - School Building Energy Usage - Monthly Report

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and my committee colleagues.

For the record, I am Senator Ron Watson representing District 23. Today, I am presenting SB 818, Education School Building Energy Usage Monthly Report, and respectfully request your favorable report. This bill does not have a fiscal impact. In fact, it will result in long-term savings for the school system by improving energy management and extending the lifespan of school buildings.

During my time as a member of the Prince George's County Board of Education, it was particularly challenging to negotiate the demands of our limited budget, and it was most difficult to identify savings. One area where schools can adjust and save is in energy consumption. Did you know that by adjusting the school building temperatures by one degree lower in winter and one degree higher in summer, this simple adjustment can save the school system approximately \$1 million annually, preserving more than ten teaching positions in a budget cycle?

I am sure many of us have probably encountered experiences, especially in a lot of buildings during the summer when it feels like a freezer, and you're forced to put on a coat inside the building, but in the winter, it's so hot that you have to remove your blazer to feel comfortable. SB 818, which requires school systems to report their energy usage to the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC), will help to ensure buildings are comfortable and schools are not wasting energy. Every month, the IAC will analyze this data to provide recommendations for energy savings and identify potential issues, ensuring optimal temperatures in school buildings and addressing other concerns. Properly heated and cooled buildings can reduce maintenance costs by up to 20% and extend the lifespan of the facilities by 20% as well.

We know that the Maryland Energy Administration provides grants to help schools decarbonize. However, this bill is not directly about green energy; it is something different. The bill does not require any additional funding, nor does it involve school construction at all. It simply requires local school systems to share their energy usage data with the IAC. This bill will hold school systems accountable for their energy usage to ensure that energy is used efficiently, and waste is minimized.

According to the IAC, this initiative is both feasible and readily implementable. We simply need to establish a structured process to move forward. Most local education agencies (LEA's) already have this energy information available through their utility providers that can upload energy usage data to a free online platform automatically each month. The platform provides free access to State agencies to upload data, eliminating the need for the schools to manually dispatch data to the State.

In addition, SB 818, will increase both transparency and accountability of LEA's. This information is essential to identifying inefficiencies, and waste providing opportunities for reducing cost and decarbonizing facilities to meet the State's adopted climate-protected goals.

I'm confident that this bill will allow us to access data effectively and efficiently, improve our practices, and significantly enhance the management of school properties. I ask for a favorable report on SB 818.