



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 0212, Maryland Building Performance Standards - Fossil Fuel Use and Electric-Ready Standards

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 26, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports building electrification as a key pathway to meeting the State's climate goals and protecting the health of Marylanders and in turn urges a favorable report on HB 212.

HB 212 requires that new buildings meet all energy demands of the building without the use of fossil fuels by 2027 for buildings less than seven stories tall, and by 2031 for buildings seven or more stories tall. New buildings that receive a waiver to this requirement must meet an electric-ready standard.

Fuel burned in buildings accounts for approximately 16% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Maryland. The electricity used in buildings accounts for an additional contribution to GHG pollution; however, this will decline over time as Maryland's energy production becomes increasingly non-emitting. As Maryland works to achieve its climate goals to reduce GHG emissions by 60% (from 2006 levels) by 2031 and reach net-zero by 2045, HB 212 will play a crucial role in meeting those targets.

Maryland has already demonstrated support for reducing GHG emissions in the buildings sector through building electrification. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has implemented Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS), which require increasing electrification and energy efficiency in buildings over 35,000 square feet. As called for in the December 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction Plan and Governor Moore's June 2024 Executive Order¹, MDE is developing Zero Emissions Heating Equipment Standards and Clean Heat Standards that will reduce emissions from residential and commercial buildings as space and water heating equipment is replaced at the end of its useful life. The legislature now has the opportunity with HB 212 to establish an additional pathway to building electrification by eliminating fossil fuel consumption in new buildings.

Building electrification of new homes, as mandated through HB 212, would have significant public health benefits. Currently close to half of homes in Maryland burn gas for appliances. Use of indoor gas appliances can increase levels of nitrous oxides, benzene, and particulates inside buildings through regular use or gas leaks, all of which generate health risk. Benzene is a known carcinogen. Inside our homes, gas appliances increase the likelihood that children will develop asthma; one study showed that children in homes with gas stoves have a 42% higher risk of asthma.

¹ 01.01.2024.19, Leadership by State Government: Implementing Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan

Requiring building electrification for new construction makes economic sense. In the absence of HB 212, some new buildings built between 2026 and 2045 would rely on fossil fuel infrastructure.² For Maryland to reach its statutorily-required climate goals, these buildings would, in all likelihood, then need to be retrofitted with new electric appliances before the fossil fuel burning appliances reach the end of their lives, at significant expense. HB 212 would set Maryland on a path that avoids these retrofit expenses. Research shows that new buildings can be constructed without burning fossil fuels at roughly the same or lower cost (+0%-5%) as buildings that use fossil fuels.³

The Sierra Club Maryland urges approval of legislation establishing an electric construction standard for new buildings, like HB 212.

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² New residences add 0.7% to total Maryland residences each year. Between 2026 and 2045, newly constructed homes would likely account for almost 11-15% of Maryland's homes.

³ In a nine-city study, RMI found lower upfront costs for electrification in new construction when the upfront cost of gas line connection is included: <https://rmi.org/insight/the-economics-of-electrifying-buildings-residential-new-construction/>. The Maryland Building Decarbonization Study early results (July 2021) also found that all-electric new construction was cheaper than mixed-fuel construction for residential homes in Maryland. https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MWG_Buildings%20Ad%20Hoc%20Group/Maryland%20Buildings%20Analysis%20Early%20Results%20E3%20Presentation%2007132021.pdf