

HB 630 Primary and Secondary Education—School District Energy use – Policy and Study

Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee

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Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is John Groutt, and I live in Salisbury Maryland and am speaking on behalf of the Wicomico Environmental Trust in favor of House Bill 630, the Primary and Secondary Education – School Energy Use – Policy and Study.

I know you are familiar with the content of HB 630 which will require Maryland public schools to monitor and lay the groundwork for comprehensive energy policies that will increase the amount of energy they use from renewable sources - and reduce the use of fossil fuel sources which are emitting huge amounts of greenhouse gases. I hardly need to remind you that we face an existential threat to the planet with rising temperatures and all that brings with it – rising seas, more frequent and violent hurricanes and tornados, new dangerous weather patterns with more frequent heavy storms and droughts setting the scene for terrifying forest fires.

We here on the Eastern Shore are the third most impacted area of the country for sea level rise resulting from the heating of the planet. In Salisbury we regularly seen the phenomenon of “sunny day flooding” on streets, resulting from sea level rise. Increasingly, once bountiful farms and forests of Somerset and Dorchester counties are now unproductive because of saltwater pouring up ditches originally dug to drain the areas. Now the higher water levels bring saltwater up those ditches into fields and forests. The Romans once spread salt on the lands of people they conquered to destroy their food supplies and livelihoods. In our case, it is our own choice of fossil fuels which is bringing the killing salt, resulting in the destruction to our food and timber, both important industries on the Shore.

No one claims this bill will remedy all this. Rather it will provide one more tool, a modest but we think important one, to begin to remedy self-destructive practices. Schools are crucial for helping form the attitudes of our children and their parents. In this case schools will be demonstrating by their self-examination and behaviors that we can indeed act to counter the threat. They will be teaching by example, as well as preparing to address a serious threat.

I have spoken to school officials in Wicomico County and they perceive no problems or unusual costs for them to implement the proposed law. Indeed they already are doing some of its practices. A few years ago they laid plans for siting solar panels on school properties in a joint venture with County officials, which would have increased the economic benefit of project. Unfortunately a new County administration withdrew from the effort. The school board went forward alone. If this proposed “School Clean Energy Bill” had been in place at that time it could have provided basic information to inform the county officials and the public on the advantages and issues, if any, with the proposed plan.

Members of the Wicomico Environmental Trust urge you to approve this Bill which offers a modest move forward to ensure that our children and future generations will live in a healthy and sustainable land.

Thanks you for your good work is service our citizens.