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Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: HB520 “State Buildings – Geothermal Energy Systems – Requirement”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 3, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club supports this legislation.

There is broad agreement in Maryland that the state needs to expand its reliance on geothermal energy. Both the Maryland Department of the Environment in its Draft Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan and the Maryland Commission on Climate Change in its 2020 Annual Report found that the state needs to install more clean, efficient, air-source and ground-source heat pumps. Direct combustion of fossil fuels for heating and other appliances in Maryland's buildings is a top-five contributor to climate pollution in the state. Geothermal systems present a clean, efficient opportunity to decrease the climate impact of our building sector and should be installed and used at a greater rate in Maryland.

We note two pieces of related legislation that are before the House this session:

- HB40, in the House Economic Matters Committee, would set in motion a comprehensive state study aimed at increasing reliance on geothermal heating and cooling systems in Maryland, with study results reported by October 1 of this year. The hearing already has been held, and the Maryland Sierra Club submitted written testimony urging a favorable report.
- HB86, which already has been heard in this Committee, seeks to ensure that buildings that receive state funds are constructed with design elements that drastically reduce environmental impacts and minimize climate pollution. The Maryland Sierra Club submitted written testimony urging a “favorable with amendments” report. Specifically, we recommended that HB86 be amended to provide that all buildings covered by its provisions be required to utilize all-electric heating systems and appliances, in addition to meeting other high-performance building requirements. This reflects a recommendation made by the Maryland Commission on Climate Change in its most recent Annual Report:

The General Assembly should require that all new state-owned buildings and major renovations to existing state-owned buildings use efficient electric systems for primary space and water heating unless granted an exception based on cost or building characteristics that would make an electric system impractical, including existing use of district heat or combined heat and power. This requirement should apply to projects covered by the Maryland High Performance Building Act.¹

For these reasons, and with this background, we support a favorable report on HB520.

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¹ Maryland Commission on Climate Change 2020 Annual Report, at 31.

<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MCCCAnnualReport2020.pdf>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.