



**Committee:** Economic Matters

**Testimony on:** HB379 - “Public Utilities – Low–Income Housing – Energy Performance Targets”

**Organization:** Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee  
**Person**

**Submitting:** Diana Younts, co-chair

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** February 4, 2021

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB379. Energy efficiency is a proven, cost-effective way to both lower the cost of energy and reduce carbon emissions. Since 2008, when the EmPOWER program was first enacted with a goal of reducing electricity usage by 15 percent by 2015, Maryland has benefited from a performance, target-driven energy efficiency portfolio.

However, low-income households are being left behind. Low-income households in particular face more barriers to address energy efficiency including mold, lead and other health and safety issues because they tend to live in older buildings. As a result, because energy is a regressive cost, low-income households in Maryland dedicate 13% of their annual incomes to energy costs and pay 550% more as a percent of income than non low-income households. The majority of these (55%) are Black, Hispanic, or Asian households. Because of these and other barriers it is more difficult for low-income households to benefit from the EmPOWER program, as compared to high-income households.

Energy is also a substantial cost for building owners and managers, so energy efficiency is a key means of preserving affordable housing. At the current pace of energy efficiency actions taken by the Maryland Department of Housing & Community Development’s Multifamily Energy Efficiency & Housing Affordability (MEEHA) program, the Low-Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP) and electric and gas utility programs, it would take 130 years to reach all 450,000 income eligible households. So far a mere 9% of eligible low-income Maryland households have received the weatherization assistance they sorely need.

Enacting HB0379 would be an important step in hastening the pace of providing energy cost assistance to low-income households because it would codify a complementary performance

driven goal for low-income housing. This new, commonsense 1% energy savings goal will allow Maryland to retrofit the 450,000 eligible low-income residents in just 13 years as opposed to 130 years projected under the current program.

Energy efficiency has already saved Maryland consumers billions of dollars, reduced air pollution and created new economic activity including good jobs. A performance goal for low-income programs is overdue.

For these reasons we urge you to vote favorably for HB0379.