



**Before the General Assembly of the State of Maryland  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
March 17, 2021**

**Testimony of David W. Murray  
Executive Director  
Chesapeake Solar & Storage Association  
SB 940: Public Safety - Fire Prevention Codes and Maryland Building Performance  
Standards - Solar Energy Generating Systems  
FAVORABLE**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on [SB 940](#). I serve as Executive Director of the Chesapeake Solar & Storage Association, CHESSA, formerly known as the Maryland-DC-Virginia Solar Energy Industries Association (MDV-SEIA). CHESSA is a regional trade association representing over 10,000 solar installers, developers, manufacturers, and other solar workers in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Our members also provide energy storage solutions to households, businesses, schools, local governments, and utilities throughout the region. CHESSA is a recognized state affiliate of the Solar Energy Industries Association.

**CHESSA strongly supports SB 940, which provides solar installers an avenue to work with local fire protection officials to maximize solar panel placement on residential rooftops.**

Historically, fire protection officials have recommended a minimum distance between solar panels and the roof edge (known as a setback) to allow them either to climb atop the roof, or place a ladder against it in the event of a fire. The specific rules which govern the necessity and length of a setback are complex; however, setbacks also restrict the number of solar panels one can install on a roof.

The impact of fire setbacks on rooftop solar installations was heightened after the state adopted the 2018 International Residential Code. In the summer of 2020, counties began enforcing the new code. This resulted in many residential solar projects getting reduced in size. Installers report the setbacks can easily cut residential rooftop project sizes by 30%, or even make some projects uneconomic so the customer opts not to place solar on their roof.

However, when speaking with firefighters, our members learned that setbacks are becoming less and less relevant to firefighting operations. Most firefighters do not get on top of the roof if the structure has been burning for over ten minutes. Or, if the roof has a truss system, or can be ventilated in another way, firefighters opt against getting on the roof. Homeowners can also drastically reduce the likelihood of rooftop operations by installing an automated sprinkler system and other fire safety measures. In essence, enforcing the new code as-is is a “one size fits all” approach that creates unnecessary restrictions for solar installations.



Rather than prescribe setbacks across the state, the amended version of SB 940 enables installers to seek guidance from local fire code officials on ways to reduce or waive the fire setback for their project. This is permitted in R324.6.1 of the 2018 International Code:

*2. Roof access, pathways, and setbacks need not be provided where the fire code official has determined that rooftop operations will not be employed.*

The language in SB940 creates an avenue for solar installers to approach the county fire code officials requesting guidance on how these setbacks can be reduced, or eliminated in certain circumstances. For example, a county may opt reduce the setback length from three feet to eighteen inches if the residence contains a truss system, and fire safety officials conclude that firefighters would not be going on the roof.

We respectfully want to give the solar industry more flexibility on where they can put panels – without compromising fire safety. This legislation is a straight-forward, fiscally neutral measure that addresses a key barrier for our installers. We respectfully urge a favorable vote on SB 940. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David Murray  
Executive Director  
Chesapeake Solar & Storage Association (CHESSA, formerly MDV-SEIA)