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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Sponsor Testimony on HB 630- The School Clean Energy Act

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation HB 630, the School Clean Energy Act. It's an honor to serve on this committee and to testify before you this afternoon.

As a former high school teacher and school district administrator, I believe nothing is more important than fully supporting our public schools. As the respected author and educator, Neil Postman, wrote and as often quoted by Congressman Elijah Cummings: "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." At the same time, we must ensure that our children and future generations will have the chance to live in a healthy and sustainable world. As climate change becomes more obvious and costly, we must focus on policies that make Maryland a leader in creating a safe, sustainable future.

My bill HB 630, the School Clean Energy Act, focuses on the intersection of these dual challenges: investing in our public schools while ensuring that school districts adopt energy policies aimed at improving energy efficiency, promoting use of renewable energy, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. When implemented, such policies will not just allow us to do our part to build a sustainable future, but will lead to cost savings from reduced fuel consumption, lower maintenance costs, and inexpensive onsite renewable power generation. The resulting savings can be used to fund other vital school educational priorities.

HB 630 would:

- Require school districts to adopt and then update their energy policies every two years;
- Require that school districts monitor key indicators of energy consumption, efficiency, renewable energy, and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Require school districts to report annually on these indicators using a standardized template developed by the Interagency Commission on School;

- Construction, the Department of the Environment, and the Maryland Energy Administration; and
- Encourage school districts to set targets for increasing reliance on renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

At the county level, school districts are often the largest energy consumers and emitters of greenhouse gases. To help Maryland achieve its 2030 and 2050 greenhouse gas emission targets, HB 630 would require the Interagency Commission to coordinate with the Energy Administration and the Clean Energy Center to study and make recommendations on how to expand and provide funding for the Maryland Net Zero Energy Schools Initiative.

We recognize that budgets for education are stretched and are wary of imposing additional financial burden on school districts. Thus, HB 630 focuses on energy policy, monitoring, reporting, and assessments without requiring significant additional budgetary outlays. By adopting more modern energy policies, including improved energy efficiency and cost-saving renewables, school districts will lower their energy costs while reducing fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions.

We reviewed the energy policies of school districts in all 23 Counties and the City of Baltimore and found that most are woefully out of date. Many were adopted in the 1990s, and some date back as far as the 1970's. Some are simple statements proclaiming a "commitment to conservation." With one exception — Baltimore City Schools — none of the school district energy policies have quantified targets for energy efficiency, use of renewable resources, or reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. While more and more county governments have been adopting policies and targets for the use of renewable energy and greenhouse gas emission reductions, it is striking that school districts are typically exempt from such policies. As some of the state's largest emitters, school districts must take the lead in addressing the climate crisis that threatens our planet.

As Maryland moves to invest in school construction in counties across the state, it is essential that school districts adopt modern energy policies. HB 630 will be a major step forward to promote more sustainable investments in our communities, our schools, and in the future of our children. Thank you.

I urge a favorable report on HB 630.