



MARYLAND
Association of
COUNTIES

Senate Bill 414

Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Environment and Transportation and
Economic Matters Committees

Date: March 31, 2021

From: Alex Butler

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 414 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill places significant burden on county governments to carry out a new state policy requiring that new school buildings be “solar-ready,” and requires local government to forego tax revenue for certain community solar projects. MACo amendments would achieve the objective of the bill by influencing school construction design and also providing needed assistance for project development.

SB 414 would place a costly mandate on county governments to design, engineer, and build new school buildings that could readily accept solar panels. MACo believes that the State should take similar action to what was done when the State mandated High Performance Buildings - that legislation created a state cost share for new requirements, leading to better buildings without unduly burdening counties with prohibitively expensive upfront expenditures. The most effective method would be to require that the State share in the costs of making a school facility “solar-ready,” in addition to its standard calculated cost developed by anticipated school population. The State share for these costs should be the amount determined for the host county under COMAR Section 14.39.02.05 - State Cost Share Percentage. Without the addition of a similar cost share arrangement, the State share would continue to only be calculated based on cost per square foot and would not incorporate the substantial costs of requiring solar-ready buildings.

SB 414 would also exempt certain community solar energy generating systems from county or municipal personal property tax. MACo understands that the solar industry is asking that the bill be amended to remove the requirement that the generating system provide energy for low or moderate-income individuals, and instead exempt all community solar projects from personal property tax, provided they are on rooftops, parking lots, roadways, or brownfields sites. Mandated tax exemptions require counties to forego meaningful local revenues to support essential public services, even if the exemptions do not serve their best interests. MACo advocates that the bill be amended to remove local tax exemptions or changed to provide a state tax credit that would offset local taxes.

The bill, as written, represents a significant unfunded mandate for county governments. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for SB 414.