

Testimony of Elly Colmers Cowan  
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Before the  
House Environment and Transportation Committee  
February 2, 2021

Pertaining To: HB517, Clean Energy Loan Program –Remediation and Resiliency

***SUPPORT***

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On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the value of history and preservation in Maryland.

Preservation Maryland is the statewide voice for historic preservation that works to protect the best of Maryland. Since 1931, we have worked tirelessly to protect the places, stories and communities in Maryland that matter. Through our Smart Growth Maryland program, we advocate for a more environmentally and economically sustainable future that creates opportunities for all Marylanders through better development patterns.

SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 517

Preservation Maryland supports HB517, which would expand the definition of what qualifies for the PACE financing program to include environmental remediation and resiliency projects. Both of these types of projects are essential to maintaining Maryland’s historic built environment for future generations.

For Maryland, the impact of an increasingly volatile climate and changing weather patterns presents real and dramatic challenges for communities across the state – especially historic resources which are often located in vulnerable locations. As we face the reality of higher seas, stronger storms, and more frequent flooding, the need to make structures in at risk areas resilient is becoming more and more pressing. HB517 would help make necessary resiliency improvements, such as flood remediation, a more viable option for many property owners.

Preservation Maryland has supported and engaged in conversations and projects focused on increasing the resiliency of historic resources throughout the state, including in historic Ellicott City after the recent devastating floods and in Dorchester County where historic resources are already being lost to sea-level rise. While certain incentive programs already exist to help rebuild *after* a flood, something more is needed to help Maryland’s oldest communities prepare their built environment *before* a natural disaster. While Preservation Maryland will continue to work with communities to respond in the wake of devastation caused by sea-level rise, we believe that the proactive approach of making buildings more resilient should be encouraged, and HB517 would help accomplish that.

Another issue that many historic properties face is the need to for environmental remediation, such as lead paint and asbestos abatement, and a recently released study on the reuse of historic government complexes in Maryland has recommended utilizing a PACE program to help finance remediation projects. One large historic rehabilitation project can be a catalyst for a community – and as a result can have a very positive economic effect for a broader area than just the project site. Indeed, historic rehabilitation projects have been shown to increase property values by 25%. Those who undertake the rehabilitation of historic properties already face the difficulties of increased project costs, with environmental remediation often being a large financial burden. Allowing the PACE program to include remediation projects would help encourage private financial investment in the redevelopment of historic structures across Maryland.

The opportunity to utilize PACE financing to make historic structures more resilient and undergo environmental remediation would go a long way to helping the private sector safeguard and preserve Maryland's historic assets, with no cost to the state.

I respectfully urge the committee to return a favorable report on HB517.