Committee: AppropriationsBudget and Taxation
Testimony on: HB0365 - Public School Construction - Fossil-Fuel Based Energy Systems Costs- Prohibition
Organization: Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Submitting: Diana Younts, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 8, 2022

Dear M. Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB365. This bill disallows the use of state matching funds for the installation of fossil-fuel based energy systems (typically gas-fired) in new and existing k-12 schools and is an important element to not only Maryland's ability but also to Montgomery County's ability to address the climate crisis.

The Maryland Commission on Climate Change has recommended that all buildings in Maryland reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 100% by 2045 and that Maryland as a whole in all sectors of the economy reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 100% by 2045. These recommended goals are embodied in other legislation introduced this session. For its part, the Montgomery County Public School System, in its Sustainability Policy that is going through the public comment period, has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. Overall, buildings are 40% of Maryland's greenhouse gas emissions.

The Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) Predicts Dramatic Increase in Cost of Gas Delivery As Maryland Transitions to Decarbonized Buildings. The MCCC has projected that gas delivery rates are likely to increase more than two to five times the current rate for consumers left on the gas system, making it all the more important from a cost perspective alone that all Maryland schools transition from fossil fuels. See MCCC Building Energy Transition Plan

In the long-term, school districts that continue to invest in fossil-fuel energy systems, particularly for new schools and energy efficient modern schools, will be burdened with vastly increased energy operating costs or be faced with the cost of replacing boilers before the end of their lifespans as the cost of gas escalates.

The Interagency Commission on School Construction encourages school districts to set targets to increase renewable energy and to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and, in particular, requires schools to perform analyses of life-cycle costs and evaluations of alternative energy systems before

being allowed to use state funds for installation of fossil fuel systems. However, thus far, in doing those analyses, schools have not factored in the predicted dramatic cost increases for gas delivery systems and thus have not adequately accounted for the escalating costs of gas. We note that there are several net-zero ready schools (i.e. schools that are designed to be ready for the installation of photovoltaic systems in order to become net-zero) in the design process or under construction on the Eastern Shore, an area that lacks a gas infrastructure. Thus in an area already facing high fossil-fuel costs (oil and propane), school districts are choosing to build schools designed to be energy efficient and solar ready.

Importantly, transitioning schools to renewable energy systems (air and ground source heat pumps and solar) and to be energy efficient is critical to Maryland and Montgomery County reaching our climate goals. Maryland's 1400 existing schools are overwhelmingly powered by gas-fired boilers. These schools and the planned new schools must be part of the solution.

For these reasons, we request a FAVORABLE report for HB365.