



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

**Testimony on HB0708
Comprehensive Climate Solutions**

Hearing Date: March 4, 2022

Bill Sponsor: Delegates Barve and Stein

Committee: House Economics Matters Committees

Submitting: Liz Feighner for Howard County Climate Action

Position: Favorable with Amendments

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing more than 1,450 subscribers, and a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#). Howard County Climate Action urges a **favorable report with strengthening amendments** (listed below) from the committee on HB0708 - Comprehensive Climate Solutions.

The IPCC challenges the world to reduce greenhouse emissions rapidly to avoid even more catastrophic effects of the climate crisis. An IPCC report released on Tuesday, Feb 28 confirms how little time we have to act. [New York Times](#) reports: Current efforts are too often “incremental.” Instead we will need “‘transformational’ changes that involve rethinking how people build homes, grow food, produce energy and protect nature.”

The Comprehensive Climate Solutions Act (HB708) is a crucial piece of legislation that sets ambitious but achievable climate goals and addresses environmental justice and climate equity to meet the challenges of these times. HB708 commits Maryland to a goal of net-zero emissions by 2045, with an interim goal of 60% reductions of greenhouse gas emissions by 2032.

HB708 focuses on equity and has provisions that develop strategies to involve black and brown communities, labor, and youth. We support the provision to direct the Maryland Department of the Environment to conduct research and data gathering on cumulative impacts and overburdened and underserved communities, in consultation with the Maryland Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities. We also applaud the creation of a Just Transition and Retraining Work Group and a Climate Justice Corps to address climate justice and a just transition to clean energy.

This is a comprehensive bill so there are many more provisions addressing a wide range of goals needed to achieve the immediate action on the climate crisis that we support and applaud. We do want to focus on the EmPOWER program provisions that seeks to update EmPOWER to align its grants and incentives with the recognition that transitioning buildings off of fossil fuels must be a key part of Maryland’s climate efforts.

Currently, EmPower does not provide incentives for the replacement of fossil-fuel heating systems with electric heat pumps. So we strongly support the proposed changes to provide

incentives to switch from gas to electric heating systems and the new restrictions to prevent subsidizing new fossil fuel heating systems while giving priority to low income households. Increasing the percentage of Empower funding from 2% to 2.75% by 2028 for purposes of reducing energy consumption, reducing consumer costs, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is crucial.

In addition to reform of the EmPower program, all recognize now we need to rethink and reform the STRIDE program. We must start with a robust planning process involving the Public Service Commission, the utilities and many other stakeholders representing public concerns to gradually reduce investment in gas infrastructure as we transition to greater and greater electrification. We expect rethinking STRIDE will involve plans to fix methane leaks by repairing gas pipelines but far short of the more expensive option of replacing all gas pipelines.

We also note that HB88 – Public Utilities – Energy Distribution Planning and Required Labor Standards, is a complementary bill which will make the implementation of HB708 and other climate bills more successful through well-planned improvements for the resilience of Maryland’s electrical distribution grid.

Finally we recommended these amendments to strengthen HB708:

1. **Climate Catalytic Capital Fund** – add a Climate Catalytic Capital Fund (C3 Fund) in the Maryland Clean Energy Center (MCEC) similar to the provisions in SB528 to provide funds for implementing climate solutions. The MCEC is Maryland’s Green Bank. Providing seed money for the C3 fund, would give the state the ability to leverage public investment with private capital. For every \$1 of public investment that fund is projected to generate \$4 to \$7 of private capital.
2. **Climate Transition and Clean Energy Hub** – move the Climate Transition and Clean Energy Hub from the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) to the Maryland Clean Energy Center, given that MEA disagreed with recommendations in the Maryland Commission on Climate Change which could affect their implementation of the Hub.
3. **Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals** – change the initial target from 60% by 2032 to 60% by 2030 to align with SB528.
4. **Environmental Justice** - replace the term “disproportionately affected communities” with “overburdened communities,” and add a requirement that 40% of funding for greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures go to “overburdened communities.
5. **Climate Justice Corps** – strengthened the Climate Justice Corps by amending it to no provide good pay, health benefits, and career training similar to other civilian corps program

Thank you for your consideration of HB0708. For all the reasons stated above, Howard County Climate Action urges a favorable vote with strengthening amendments listed above..

Howard County Climate Action

Submitted by Liz Feighner and Ruth White, Steering and Advocacy Committee

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