

Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB524 Public Utilities – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs – Energy Performance Targets and Low-Income Housing

Submitted by: Donald M. Goldberg, Executive Director

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 15, 2022

Climate Law & Policy Project urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 524.

For too long, low-income households have been unable to receive their share of benefits provided by Maryland’s clean energy and energy efficiency programs. The EmPower Maryland Program is required to improve statewide energy efficiency by 2% per year, but although low-income households pay into the EmPOWER program at the same rate as other electricity customers, they receive a very small fraction of that improvement as a percentage of their energy consumption.

Low-income households in Maryland dedicate 13% of their annual incomes to energy costs and pay 550% more as a percent of income than non low-income households. The majority of these are Black, Hispanic, or Asian households. Low-Income homes have been left behind in the transition to greater energy efficiency because they tend to be older and in need of health and safety remediation such as lead and mold removal before they can be weatherized.

The legislature now has an opportunity to fix this, by codifying a complementary performance driven goal for low-income housing. This new, common sense, ramp up to a 1% energy savings goal will allow Maryland to retrofit the 450,000 eligible low-income residents at least 100 years sooner than the 130 years projected under the current program.

It is not conscionable to withhold assistance to low-income households from Maryland’s energy programs that is readily available to Maryland’s wealthier citizens.

We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 524.