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UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND
EXTENSION
Solutions in your community

To: House Ways and Means Committee

From: Dr. Sara Via, Professor and Climate Extension Specialist,
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Re: *Testimony in support of HB 76*

HB 76 helps Maryland address three key problems associated with climate change and environmental justice:

1. There is no time to wait on climate action. Climate change is accelerating and its impacts on Maryland's people and economy are becoming more serious each year. By increasing the generation of solar power within Maryland and encouraging solar development on marginal land such as parking lots and brownfields, HB 76 contributes positively to Maryland's rational response to the climate crisis.

2. Low and middle income (LMI) families pay a larger share of their incomes for household energy while suffering disproportionately from air and water pollution from electricity generation. HB 76 addresses both of these environmental injustices. The proposed 20% discount on electricity will greatly assist LMI households, where keeping warm in winter and cool in summer is an ongoing economic burden. Although the proposed community solar projects will generate only modest amounts of electricity, they still put us one step closer to reducing unhealthy air and water pollution from Maryland's remaining coal-fired generating plants. This benefits all Marylanders and is particularly helpful to LMI communities closest to the outdated coal-fired plants.

3. Using land for solar arrays that is otherwise unsuitable for development is an essential step forward in the energy transition. Because it is cheaper and easier to install solar arrays on open farmland, most solar developers favor agricultural sites for their installations. Using agricultural land in this way is massively shortsighted, particularly in a state like Maryland where there is ongoing pressure to develop agricultural land. Why jeopardize future food production when open land unsuitable for development is abundant? Offering incentives to site solar arrays on otherwise unusable land like brownfields, closed landfills and parking lots gives these barren wastelands new value while protecting valuable farmland.

In addition, establishing meadows of native plants around solar arrays on brownfields and old landfills adds additional value by increasing biodiversity and improving water management. Solar parking canopies provide welcome relief from the relentless heat radiated from asphalt parking lots while generating clean energy to power our electric vehicles. These are images of the kind of world we can have by choosing to totally electrify buildings and transportation and then to power it all with clean renewable energy like wind and solar.

I encourage you to give HB 76 a positive report to support Maryland's efforts to make this cleaner and more environmentally just world a reality. Thank you!