



House Bill 1099

Electricity - Solar Energy Generating Stations - Fire Suppression

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Economic Matters Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 23, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1099 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill seeks to require that owners of certain utility scale batteries install automatic fire suppression systems. MACo's amendments seek to expand the requirement to all utility scale batteries.

In order to fully transition from fossil fuels, it is incumbent that Maryland adopt multiple avenues of renewable power generation and storage. As this transition progresses, counties are seeing various actors start to embrace utility scale batteries as an efficient method to store energy, especially for power sources that are not continual, notably solar energy. Predominantly the solar industry has taken the lead with adopting these technologies, but so too are commercial, residential, and industrial actors.

Utility scale batteries come with a slew of issues yet to be fully addressed by policy makers. In at least two instances, county officials were told by battery operators that if there is a fire in the area surrounding a solar installation (and its battery storage), to not respond with conventional first responders, and to instead evacuate the area immediately. Unlike a traditional fire, utility scale battery fires burn hotter and longer, and may discharge a mass of toxic chemicals. The equipment, resources, and effort required to extinguish one of these fires is scales of magnitude higher than what many county fire departments can reasonably handle.

While counties agree that utility scale battery technology is important to the future of the energy grid, it is important that we recognize the risks associated with this technology and adopt policy to address those realities. Counties ask that HB 1099 be amended to require that all utility scale batteries (not merely those connected to solar installations) have adequate automatic fire suppression systems. Without adopting the proper precautions, Maryland needlessly risks the lives and property of residents in the name of electrification. These are not and should not be mutually exclusive objectives.

Counties support the intent of HB 1099 but urge the Committee to expand the provisions of this bill to go even further to cover all utility scale batteries. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 1099.