

Sponsor Testimony
County and Municipal Street Lighting Investment Act
Delegate Aaron Kaufman
HB 459

House Bill 459 is enabling legislation that will permit county and municipal governments to accelerate investment in energy efficient street lighting. Upgrading streetlights using recent technological advances benefits local governments by improving safety and reducing energy and maintenance costs. The bill would allow municipalities to purchase and maintain their own streetlights.

Concerningly, counties and municipalities in Maryland are far behind other states in upgrading to modern street lighting technology. Only a small number of utility-owned streetlights in the state have been upgraded. For example, only 4% of the 65,000 utility-owned streetlights in the Pepco service territory in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties have been converted to energy efficient LED streetlights.

House Bill 459 will remedy the lack of investment in energy efficient street lighting by authorizing local governments to assume ownership of lighting infrastructure,.

This bill is not unprecedented but rather modeled after successes in other states such as California, New York Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia which have moved to allow local government ownership of lighting infrastructure. A federally funded study conducted by The Maryland Energy Administration in 2020 found that conversion of utility-owned lights to municipal ownership is a best practice, and it underscored the need for strong legislation. Power companies' opposition to this bill is unfortunate but entirely predictable because the status quo works for them but not for our municipalities. Pepco says they are close to reaching an agreement on this issue with advocates and the PSC and advocates but this issue has been around for many years and the success of the negotiations remains to be seen.

House Bill 459 has been improved from previous versions to include important input from the Maryland Public Service Commission.

Accelerating investment in energy efficient street lighting is needed to reduce Maryland's carbon footprint while also improving safety and reducing energy and maintenance costs. Together, we can achieve greater energy efficiency and empower our municipalities with greater autonomy. For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable vote on House Bill 459.