



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

SB689/HB904: Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions - Alterations and Requirements (Energy Savings Act)

Hearing Date: Feb. 28, 2023

Bill Sponsor: Senator Lewis Young

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Submitting: Liz Feighner for Howard County Climate Action

Position: Favorable - Support with Sponsor Amendments only

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing more than 1,400 subscribers. It is also a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#).

Howard County Climate Action supports SB689/HB904, a bill critical to implementation of the purpose and goals of the Climate Solutions Act of 2022. This bill retains the best features of the current EmPOWER program: free or discounted energy audits, weatherization help and rebates for energy efficient home appliances. But it fixes the current EmPOWER program to align with the goals of the Climate Solutions Now Act.

First, we must reduce the use of fossil fuels, especially fossil gas which is methane, 84x as strong a climate pollutant as carbon dioxide. The current EmPOWER program allows incentives to install new methane/fossil gas appliances and those incentives will no longer be allowed in the new program.

Second, the current program is focused on reducing the use of electricity. The focus must change to reducing fossil fuels. Fossil fuels appliances in the home are responsible for about 18% of Maryland's climate polluting greenhouse gasses.

Third, the current program does not provide incentives to a customer wanting to switch from a gas appliance to an electric appliance, creating a disincentive to electrification. This is incompatible with the goals of the Climate Solutions Now Act and is changed under this bill.

This bill has many provisions to incentivize electrification and to provide more support to low/moderate income families to take advantage of home upgrades, including;

- A program for State-issued rebates for residential electrification upgrades and provision for coordination with the many federal rebates now available
- A program for navigators to assist owners with whole-home retrofits, retrofits addressing lead removal, mold remediation, asbestos, air quality. These are problems common in some housing (especially for the lower income) that must be fixed before a house is "weatherized", i.e, made less drafty. Lack of whole-home retrofits has been a major barrier to heating upgrades in the past, since health problems from these issues

compound in a less drafty house. And you need a tightly sealed house to get the best benefit from a more efficient heat pump.

There has been wide publicity on the studies demonstrating the dangers of toxic emissions from gas stoves, which even when turned off, cause a 42% increase in asthma symptoms in children. All electric homes will be healthier for people of all ages, but especially any with vulnerable lung conditions. And SB689 provision for whole home retrofits will obviously increase health benefits, especially for the low-income and disadvantaged.

We are excited about the synergy between the provisions of this bill and provisions of another bill on EmPOWER which passed last year but was vetoed by the then Governor, and which will hopefully pass this year. This bill, sponsored by Senator Feldman.(SB144, Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs - Energy Performance Targets and Low-Income Housing), changes EmPOWER to specially address the current radical disparity in assistance. The current EmPOWER program disproportionately funds energy upgrades for the wealthy, and well-to-do, and does not reach poor and disadvantaged communities proportionately. In addition to focusing more money on those in need, SB144 establishes a plan to provide energy efficiency retrofits to all low-income households by 2031.

In summary, pass both bills!

We urge a favorable report for SB689 (with sponsor amendments only).

Howard County Climate Action

Submitted by Liz Feighner, Steering and Advocacy Committee

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