

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

POSITION: Support SB 144 Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs - Energy Performance Targets and Low-Income Housing

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 144 offered by Senator Feldman. This legislation provides assistance for households to ensure that energy efficient home upgrades, which not only reduce energy bills but also improve residents' health, are accessible to all Marylanders.

In Maryland, TNC's work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. TNC has an institutional goal to support reducing global emissions by avoiding or sequestering 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year by 2030. We are dedicated to creating a future where people and nature thrive together.

The buildings sector is one of the largest carbon emitting sectors in Maryland, contributing 16 percent of the state's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2022. The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 set state goals to reduce emissions by 60 percent by 2031 and reach net-zero by 2045. In order to meet these ambitious goals, Maryland needs to take immediate actions to mitigate emissions in the state's highest producing sectors. There can, however, be cost barriers for reducing emissions, including in the buildings sector. Many Maryland residents are unable to afford upgraded equipment, weatherization processes or home retrofits that will create more energy efficient homes and reduce overall carbon emissions. SB 144 seeks to address this by establishing energy efficiency targets and conservation programs that will be available for low-income households in Maryland.

SB 144 would require the Department of Housing and Community development to establish programs and services to assist low-income households across the state to meet energy efficiency goals. Establishing these programs will assist communities in procuring and installing energy saving features in homes through coordinating and leveraging funding to provide upgrades and energy efficiency retrofits to all low-income households in Maryland. As a result, these upgrades will assist the state in meeting targeted annual energy savings goals as well as set low-income households on a path forward for both reduced energy consumption and lower costs for energy needs. SB 144 puts forth a plan of action that will assist Maryland in meeting the Climate Solutions Now Act mitigation targets through reducing energy use, removing barriers for access to energy efficient homes, and clearing a path toward significant buildings sector emissions reductions.

TNC commends Senator Feldman for continuing to raise the bar for Maryland's climate commitments and advancing climate solutions that can provide valuable environmental, economic, and public health co-benefits for all Marylanders for years to come.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 144.