



**SB689 – Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions -
Alterations and Requirements**

**Testimony before
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

February 28, 2023

Position: Favorable

Dear Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members,

My name is Ruth White, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today to **support with the sponsor's amendments SB689**, which updates the EmPOWER Maryland Energy Efficiency Program to align it with the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals. We are grateful for the leadership of Senator Lewis Young in sponsoring this critical legislation.

This legislation is a necessary complement to the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 which provided the State with ambitious climate goals, culminating in netzero emissions by 2045. EmPOWER, which currently aims to reduce electricity use, is out of step with this goal. To reach Maryland's new goals, we must dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels used in homes. SB689 requires EmPOWER to promote fuel switching from gas to electricity by supporting home owners in replacing old fossil fuel equipment with more efficient electric appliances. Such a switch also lowers monthly costs over the life of the new appliance.

Currently, EmPOWER provides incentives for upgrades to gas appliances, which is totally incompatible with the goals of the Climate Solutions Act. Under this legislation, the incentives for gas appliances are eliminated.

As members of Indivisible, we are very focused on both rapid reduction of greenhouse gasses and equity in providing resources for the disadvantaged. This bill establishes a program that not only distributes state-issued rebates for residential electrification upgrades, but it also provides for coordination with the many federal rebates now available. It creates a program to assist owners with whole-home retrofits, including lead and asbestos removal, mold remediation, and addressing air quality problems common in some housing (especially for the lower income) that must be fixed before "weatherization". Lack of whole-home retrofits has been a major barrier for EmPOWER in the past.

All-electric homes with whole-home retrofits are healthier homes, with electric stoves, protecting children and anyone with vulnerable lung conditions from toxic emissions from gas stoves.

Finally, SB689 retains the best of the current EmPOWER program: free or discounted energy audits, weatherization help, and rebates for energy efficient home appliances.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. **We respectfully urge a favorable report on this bill with the sponsor's amendments.**

Ruth White
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