



Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB0864 – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans
Organization: The Jewish Community Relations Council, (JCRC)
Howard County, MD
Submitting: Betsy Singer and Laura Salganik, Co-chairs
Position: FAVORABLE
Hearing Date: February 29, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The JCRC of Howard County urges action to slow climate change. Repair of the world (*tikkun olam*) is a guiding tenant of our Jewish faith. We are compelled to act to prevent massive changes to Earth’s climate as we face rising temperatures due to burning fossil fuels that trap greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere.

The fastest and most affordable way to lower our energy usage is to make our homes, businesses, and communities more energy efficient. Maryland has a program in place, EmPOWER, that helps Marylanders increase the efficiency of buildings and decrease the amount of energy used. Since its implementation in 2008, it has saved Marylanders \$12.7 billion on energy bills and reduced Maryland’s greenhouse gas emissions by 9.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to taking 2 million cars off the road per year.

But we need to update the EmPOWER program to meet today’s priorities as outlined in Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction Plan. As part of that plan, Maryland needs to expand EmPOWER’s successful discounts and rebates for energy audits, weatherization, and efficient appliances by adding new incentives to switch to efficient, electric appliances and heating of homes and water. Fuel-switching incentives can be combined with federal Inflation Reduction Act incentives to further reduce their costs.

An updated EmPOWER should also have a distinct environmental justice focus that helps more Marylanders, especially those who are underserved and underrepresented, to take advantage of these programs. The bill can also help low-income households by directing the Department of Housing and Community Development to dedicate multilingual community outreach specialists to promoting the EmPOWER Program.

For these reasons, we strongly support HB0864 and urge a FAVORABLE report in committee.