



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support

HB 864 - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans (EmPOWER Reform)

To: Chair Wilson and the Members of the Economic Matters Committee
From: Phil Webster, PhD
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Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.
Date: February 29, 2024

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) strongly supports **HB 864 - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans (EmPOWER Reform)** and urges a FAVORABLE report by the committee.

The UULM-MD is a statewide faith-based advocacy organization, with over 1,200 members, based on the Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists believe in *“justice and equity in human relations”* and *“respect for the interconnected web of all existence of which we are a part.”*

This bill addresses Environmental Justice issues faced by low and moderate income families and requires reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as follows:

- Keep what EmPOWER does best by continuing to offer free or discounted energy audits, help weatherize homes, and provide rebates for efficient heating and appliances.
- Align EmPOWER with Maryland climate goals -
 - Shift program goals from electrical savings to greenhouse gas emissions reductions goals, directing the Public Service Commission to set specific goals for each utility with a set of clear parameters.
 - Require that electric utilities provide incentives for switching to clean, efficient electric appliances and home heating, which will open up access for the use of federal incentives. Electric appliances and equipment are tremendously more efficient and less polluting than gas appliances.
 - Ensure that consumers who want to switch to electric appliances have access to state and federal incentives—without mandating they switch to “electric appliances”
 - Make these changes to both the utility run portion of EmPOWER and the Department of Housing run programs directed at low-income households.

- Deliver more savings to customers -
 - Establish a clear benchmark of 85% for what percent of goals are met though in home energy efficiency measures (behind the meter).
 - Direct the Department of Housing to staff multilingual community outreach specialists to promote the programs and help low-income households access federal and state incentives.
 - Bring down costs to utility customers by lowering the rate of return to utilities on existing EmPOWER debt.

We support this bill and urge a FAVORABLE report in committee.

Phil Webster

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Lead Advocate, Climate Change UULM-MD