

HB0864 EmPOWER Energy Efficiency Act -- **FAVORABLE**

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If we are to achieve the targeted 60% reduction of state greenhouse gas emissions by 2031, Governor Moore and the Maryland General Assembly must engage all Marylanders in energy efficiency efforts. I urge the Senate to pass the EmPOWER Maryland Efficiency Act of 2024, which expands a program that since 2008 has saved utility customers more than \$4 billion dollars on their energy bills and reduced greenhouse gas emissions by at least 9.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The reformed EmPOWER takes a substantial step toward making energy improvements more accessible to all Marylanders. It provides households and businesses with additional discounts and rebates for energy audits, weatherization, and efficient appliances. It increases accessibility to low-income households by funding the switch from gas to electric and hiring multilingual community outreach specialists. And it delivers savings directly to Maryland households by encouraging utility companies to invest in customers' home energy efficiency improvements.

I can personally attest to the necessity of these amendments. Last year in Michigan, I worked on the City of Ann Arbor's groundbreaking initiative to transition the frontline Bryant neighborhood to carbon neutrality by 2030. The majority of homeowners and renters in this community are people of color; 75% live in poverty; and many are elderly with limited technology facility. I listened to concerns about clean energy projects sponsored by the government and utility companies, which reflected residents' experiences of being marginalized by authorities. The Bryant project provided community outreach workers to help residents understand the advantages of weatherization and energy retrofits to their homes and follow through with applications to access state and federal funding for home energy upgrades. This process of building trust between project managers and community members was absolutely essential to signing people up for free energy audits and initiating renovations and retrofits.

We cannot diminish the devastating impacts of climate change on our communities solely through technology and top-down decision-making from government and organizational leadership. Climate action plans become real and transformative when the average individual can make practical lifestyle changes to improve energy conservation and efficiency.