

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment
Testimony on: HB0864 – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans
Submitting: Elizabeth Singer
Position: FAVORABLE with Amendments
Hearing Date: March 20, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

As an individual who has advocated for public action on climate change for the past 15 years, I ask you to support substantive and timely updates to a successful energy efficiency program managed by our local utilities.

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. Costs to ratepayer should be reduced by rightsizing utility profits and ensuring that any future incentives and penalties are tied to performance.

An updated EmPOWER program 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. By reducing the amount of energy people consume and reducing the amount of infrastructure need by moving from fossil fuels to clean energy, efficiency helps ratepayers pay less on their utility bills. 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, I strongly support HB864 and support a FAVORABLE with Amendments vote.