



Senate Bill 788

Battery Storage and Solar Arrays Safety Training Grant Program and Fund

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Budget & Taxation Committee

Date: February 21, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 788 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would provide resources to counties to both educate the public on the potential public safety consequences of utility scale batteries installed on solar installations and to better equip and train local firefighters. MACo's suggested amendments seek to expand the requirement to all utility scale batteries – while many such facilities are attached to solar installations, the proper policy concern is the battery, not the solar.

To fully transition from fossil fuels, it is incumbent that Maryland adopt multiple avenues of renewable power generation and storage. As this transition progresses, counties are seeing various actors start to embrace utility scale batteries as an efficient method to store energy, especially for power sources that are not continual, notably solar energy. Predominantly, the utility and data center industries have taken the lead with adopting these technologies, but so too are commercial, residential, and industrial actors employing various energy sources.

Lithium-ion batteries generally, and utility scale batteries particularly, come with a slew of issues yet to be fully addressed by policy makers – to this end, MACo is working with House & Senate sponsors on bipartisan legislation to examine lithium-ion battery safety at all levels and present recommendations to state and local leaders. Unlike a traditional fire, utility scale battery fires burn hotter and longer, and may discharge a mass of toxic chemicals. *The equipment, resources, and effort required to extinguish one of these fires is scales of magnitude higher than what many county fire departments can reasonably handle.* In at least two instances, county officials were told by battery operators that if there is a fire in the area surrounding a solar installation (and its battery storage), to not respond with conventional first responders, and to instead evacuate the area immediately.

While counties acknowledge that utility scale battery technology is an important component in the evolving energy grid, it is also important that Maryland and its first responders understand and recognize the risks associated with this technology and adopt policy to address those realities. Counties request that SB 788 be amended to include training and education on the dangers of all utility scale batteries, not merely those connected to solar installations.

Counties support the intent of SB 788 but urge the Committee to expand the bill's scope to cover all utility scale batteries, independent of their intended use. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 788.