



## House Bill 61

### *Public School Construction and Renovation - Solar Canopies for School Parking Lots - Underground Infrastructure*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

**WITH AMENDMENTS**

Date: January 28, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 61 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill mandates all new or renovated parking lots at a public school shall be required to be designed, engineered, and constructed with the underground infrastructure for an eventual solar canopy. With a few reasonable adjustments, HB 61 could be a viable avenue for sustainable energy generation in many public school buildings across Maryland.

Counties appreciate the intent of HB 61 and would like to find ways to encourage this kind of development without adding an unreasonable burden on local government and school finances. The first challenge to overcome is that this type of infrastructure will not be appropriate or even possible for all locations. **HB 61 should identify clear exceptions to the mandate in this bill if a local jurisdiction, during the process of renovating or constructing a new parking lot, finds that the site is not viable for an eventual solar canopy.**

Secondly, it is well understood that the demand for new and renovated school facilities has risen due to mandates from the Built to Learn Act and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. At the same time, the State's ability to participate in cost sharing on vital projects has significantly eroded, while the volume and cost of projects have soared in recent years. Reports from both the Interagency Commission on School Construction and the Spending Affordability Committee both confirm this.

In response, local jurisdictions have been forced to forward fund, and in some cases, fully fund projects on their own. In light of these economic realities, the requirements of HB 61 – with certain exceptions outlined above – could be achieved only through a revenue stream that does not put additional pressure on already strained local and state resources. **To this end, the bill should require the State to identify sufficient federal or state funding for sites that are deemed eligible for the required installations. Funding should cover the full cost of the solar canopy lifecycle, including but not limited to the underground infrastructure, the eventual canopy, and decommissioning.**

Exploring practical ways to increase the availability of renewable energy sources in Maryland is a shared value amongst counties. This bill could be a meaningful step toward the State's renewable energy goals if it can address the challenges outlined above. For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** on HB 61.