



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment/ Economic Matters
Testimony on: SB 931/ HB 1036, Public Utilities - Generating Stations - Generation and Siting (Renewable Energy Certainty Act)
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 28, 2025

Introduction:

The Maryland Chapter commends General Assembly leadership for addressing our energy challenges head on. Marylanders are facing increasing electricity rates and growing energy demand, and bringing energy generation online is not currently keeping pace. We commend MGA leadership in working hard to find solutions to expand energy generation, improve regulatory oversight, and reduce rates for Maryland ratepayers. Sierra Club supports many provisions proposed in the leadership energy package and appreciates the opportunity to be part of this important conversation.

This testimony provides a summary of our position on the leadership package as a whole, followed by specific comments on SB 937 / HB 1035.

SB 931/ HB 1036 – Renewable Energy Certainty Act

Sierra Club supports SB 931/ HB 1036, which will create statewide siting standards for solar and battery storage projects and establish consumer protections by setting standards for installers.

SB 909/ HB 1037 – Energy Resource Adequacy and Planning Act

Sierra Club supports SB 909/ HB 1037, which will build much-needed staff capacity within the Maryland government to engage in assessing resource adequacy and to facilitate long-term scenario planning. Combined with improved utility planning via the Affordable Grid Act (SB 908/ HB 1225), this bill will ensure Maryland is planning for the energy future it wants and has everything it needs to reach that future.

SB 937 / HB 1035 – Next Generation Energy Act.

Sierra Club appreciates the intent of SB 937/ HB 1035 – to create new incentives and remove regulatory barriers to deploying new energy technologies. We support provisions to restrict out-of-market deals between data centers and energy generators, which could harm Maryland ratepayers. While we commend the broad definition of “dispatchable energy” used in the bill, we believe that the procurement mechanism proposed would not be effective in increasing battery storage deployment in the State. Moreover, we cannot support legislation that would incentivize or accelerate fracked-gas generation or new nuclear power.

Remarks on SB 931/ HB 1036 – Renewable Energy Certainty Act:

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Solar energy is an essential component of our clean energy future. The lower cost of solar energy generation as compared to fossil fuel generation and the huge increase in solar energy manufacturing capacity in the U.S. – surpassing 50 GW – is proof that with the right policies and investments, solar can be a win not just for the environment, but also for the hardworking families who will see lower energy bills and more stable jobs in the green economy.

Through the Clean Energy Jobs Act (2019), Maryland set the statutory target of achieving 14.5% of the state’s electricity consumption from solar generation by 2030, and has reaffirmed its commitment to this goal through the 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

Maryland has made progress in increasing solar deployment. Solar energy is an essential component of Maryland’s strategy in transitioning the state to clean renewable energy. Solar currently provides almost 7% of Maryland’s in-state generation, enough to power 282,645 homes. The solar industry supports 4,973 jobs.¹ Solar comes in all shapes and sizes, from large utility-scale solar projects that can provide several hundred megawatts of power, similar to a small power plant, to community systems that may power a hundred homes, to small residential rooftop systems.

Solar can grow more rapidly in the near term than any other energy source. There are thousands of megawatts of solar projects slated for Maryland in the PJM Queue, which are waiting to be deployed. Further, residential and community solar have the advantage of not requiring interconnection through the PJM Queue, a complicated process required for large power plants that can delay new power for four or more years.

However, several factors have impeded solar from reaching its full potential, and Maryland is falling far short of achieving its annual solar energy targets. Maryland must ensure that PJM clears the projects in its Queue so they can be built expeditiously. But even if this is addressed, progress may be slow because of onerous and arbitrary local zoning rules and permitting processes.

Maryland needs statewide standards for solar

SB 931/ HB 1036 seeks to address the specific challenge of overly onerous local zoning ordinances and provide certainty to the growing clean energy technology industry. Establishing

¹ <https://seia.org/state-solar-policy/maryland-solar/>

certain requirements for the construction of a CPCN scale solar energy generating station or energy storage device will provide standardization and level expectations.

The legislation proposes standardized rules, including setbacks, height limitations, and bonding, as well as processes that require public notification and engagement. The legislation does not change current law that directs the Public Service Commission (PSC) to give consideration to concerns from local governments. Further, we want to reinforce that solar and storage projects will still be subject to environmental land use laws.

We recognize that communities have concerns about local control, and there are specific concerns about local environmental impacts, such as loss of farmland. We encourage legislators to engage with stakeholders and consider additions or changes to the bill that will still have the intended impact while also addressing specific local environmental or landscape impacts.

The Maryland Sierra Club strongly appreciates that during the 2025 legislative session, the General Assembly has prioritized discussing a variety of energy policies that focus on deploying clean energy and grid enhancing technologies in a way that is quicker, more affordable, and targeted to improve grid reliability. Particularly at a time when Americans are facing uncertainty and rising electricity costs, it is refreshing that Maryland's public officials are so thoroughly discussing potential solutions. We appreciate concerns raised by local government and conservation groups and look forward to reviewing amendments from different stakeholders that reflect an even broader consensus proposal.

Sierra Club supports the Renewable Energy Certainty Act and looks forward to taking part in this ongoing conversation. **We encourage a favorable report on SB 931/ HB 1036.**

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