



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 6, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair
Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill 344: Property Tax – Agricultural Use Assessment – Community Solar Energy Generating Systems

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee:

At a time when Marylanders face significant electricity price increases, wider deployment of community solar energy generating systems can provide crucial relief for low- and moderate-income households. **Howard County supports SB344 because it will help enable more households to access cleaner and cheaper electricity** through shared solar arrays without incurring upfront costs or installation requirements. Community solar programs ensure that the financial benefits of solar energy reach residents who cannot install their own solar system. These are often low- and moderate-income residents. Such programs let households subscribe to a share of a larger solar system located elsewhere and buy solar at a discount.

Howard County is a leader on climate action, clean energy deployment, and conservation of natural habitat and agricultural lands. From the start of my Administration in December 2018, my team and I made a deliberate effort to pursue solar energy on multiple fronts, because solar power gives us something rare: a solution that is clean, cost-effective, and full of possibility. Early in 2019, I signed Howard County on to the “We Are Still In Declaration,” aligning our county’s efforts to the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

Also in 2019, Howard County became the first county in the nation to accept the U.S. Climate Alliance’s Natural & Working Lands Challenge. In so doing, we committed to implementing nature-based climate solutions to maximize opportunities to reach net zero emissions through carbon storage in healthy soils, forests, meadows, and farmland. This is good for our agricultural community and our quality of life.

Our landmark 2020 solar Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) is the largest in the state and it includes rooftop, ground mount, and parking canopies on public and private lands (including agrivoltaics). With our work under this PPA nearly 100% complete, it already generates some 32 million kWh of electricity a year. That is enough to power 3,000 homes for a year or to meet more than half of the electricity needed by all Howard County government buildings. This PPA will save the County well over \$30 million in energy costs over its 25-year term.



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Our commitment to climate action and sustainability was further recognized in 2022 when the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) gave its highest LEED “Platinum” ranking to Howard County under USGBC’s Cities and Communities program. Howard County was the nation’s first county to earn this prestigious LEED Platinum designation.

In launching our June 2023 “*Climate Forward: Climate Action and Resiliency Plan*,” I committed Howard County to the ambitious goals of reducing greenhouse gases by 60% by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2045. Clean energy deployment is integral to our Climate Forward plan and we have seen solar generation grow by nearly 40% in Howard County over the past two years. While we now have over 150 megawatts (MW) of solar generation in the county, our aim is to reach solar capacity of 437 MW by 2030 and 1,133 MW by 2045.

Toward that end, we have expanded our “whole-of-government” approach to undertaking a “whole-of-community” approach to further expand solar energy in Howard County. We are now negotiating a second solar PPA, which we are doing jointly with Howard County Community College and the Howard County Public School System. With support from the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA), we are working to develop several County-led community solar projects a former landfill, a shared septic reserve site, and other County properties.

We are working with non-profit partners to spur residential solar adoption and we have reduced procedural barriers to help families and businesses adopt solar power more quickly through our new streamlined “Solar Express” permit process. As a result of these and other efforts, the SolSmart organization awarded its highest “Platinum” designation to Howard County last December, making us just the eighth local government in the nation to earn this designation.

Recent federal roadblocks to clean energy make it imperative for states and localities to boost clean energy deployment. SB-344 would promote community solar development by extending to 2030 the period during which land hosting community solar systems simultaneously used for agriculture (agrivoltaics) may retain its agricultural zoning status. Identifying land for solar generation can be a major challenge, so this extension would incentivize the development of agrivoltaics at no cost to the State or to Maryland residents. Also, community solar agrivoltaics may help struggling farmers retain their farm by providing additional revenue.

Now is the time to help ensure that the clean energy transition does not leave out vulnerable communities that can most benefit from cheaper electricity. Community solar programs help democratize solar access and create cleaner and cheaper electricity for Marylanders. Howard County requests the Committee’s **favorable report for SB344**.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive