



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

HB 1532 – Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act

DATE: March 25, 2026
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
POSITION: Favorable with Amendments
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to pass HB 1532 – Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act with the proposed amendments.

This bill creates a strong policy framework to address the energy affordability challenges our community is facing. As currently drafted, it makes changes to the EmPOWER Maryland Program, mandates the use of a uniform solar permitting software for local jurisdictions, requires the Power Plant Research Program (PPRP) to study a possible state-level zoning framework for certain energy projects, institutes a registration requirement for data centers, and more. Frederick County is supportive of efforts to reduce energy costs for Marylanders, increase responsible solar development, and regulate data centers and other large load customers to mitigate their impacts on ratepayers.

However, I have a few concerns that can be addressed with minor amendments, including the proposed MACo amendments.

Regulating Large Load Users

As drafted, this legislation includes new registration requirements for data centers and other large load users. This registration takes water and energy usage into account and provides the state with information that is crucial to ensuring these users do not overload our systems. As you may know, Frederick County has done extensive work to regulate data center development within our community, limiting data center sprawl and preventing data centers from being located on more than 99% of the County's landmass. I commend the State for taking further action to regulate this industry and protect ratepayers from impacts of large load uses.

To further protect our residents and help provide local governments with the tools they need, I request an amendment to allow counties to require proof of registration with the Public Service Commission for these projects before the approval of development plans or the issuance of building permits. Please see our requested amendment below:

On page 60, line 7, insert:

(F) A local jurisdiction may require proof of registration with the Commission as a condition of approval of development plans or issuance of building permits.

This would provide counties like Frederick with the necessary information and regulatory tools to protect our community.

Permitting Solar

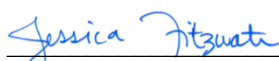
While solar permitting software could be a helpful tool in creating a uniform state-wide process for solar development, local oversight is still a critical component to ensuring public safety. This is particularly important when it comes to inspections of rooftop solar development which HB 1532 mandates local governments allow to occur with remote inspections if county inspection timelines exceed 5 days. Frederick County's rooftop solar permits are already expedited, with most residential rooftop solar permits receiving approval within 3–5 business days, and the requirement for remote inspections or a new software for these permits could create health and safety concerns and permitting delays.

Although remote inspections may be appropriate for certain limited elements of rooftop installations, they are not safe or adequate for verifying electrical panel upgrades, energy storage systems, or structural conditions. These installations require physical inspection to ensure the protection of life and property, and remote formats cannot reliably confirm code compliance. Onsite inspections ensure solar installations meet building and electrical codes, maintaining clearances, access pathways, ventilation, and proper structural mounting to protect first responders and property owners. Inspectors also verify safe electrical connections, grounding, and breaker configurations to prevent shock, arc flash hazards, and electrical fires. These safety checks require in person verification and limiting inspections to remote-only reviews would undermine inspection ethics and compromise public safety while also putting our first responders in danger. MACo's amendment would require counties to complete these inspections within 7 days, ensuring an expedited process without risking public safety.

Studying Zoning Framework

HB 1532 also requires the Power Plant Research Program (PPRP) to study a possible state-level zoning framework for certain energy projects. Historically, counties have little control over energy projects as this is largely regulated by the State and Federal government. However, I believe that counties could provide valuable input to a study of a potential zoning framework for these projects. The inclusion of local governments in this study would ensure that recommendations reflect local comprehensive plans, county infrastructure capacity, and community impacts. MACo's amendment would include counties in this process, providing us with the opportunity to share local feedback.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 1532. I urge you to advance this bill with a favorable with amendments report.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD