

Testimony: SB381– Education- School Building Energy Usage – Monthly Report
Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment
Submitting: Deborah A. Cohn
Position: Favorable
Hearing: February 27, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of SB381. Maryland public school systems face challenges in trying to track their building energy consumption and then use the data to reduce energy use and utility costs. Most public school systems are strapped for cash, and given the shortage of qualified teachers and other needs of students and schools, they rightly invest considerable funds in staff.

I've seen the difficulty the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and County Council are facing trying to fund the needed improvements in energy efficiency and energy systems the new Superintendent courageously identified. He acknowledged the significant energy efficiency improvements MCPS has made through low cost changes. Examples include (i) frequent monitoring of water usage and room temperature to detect leaks or temperature variances rather than waiting for utility bills to identify problems, (ii) more frequent maintenance of equipment degradation, such as aging compressors, which can significantly reduce energy efficiency well before system replacement and upgrade is needed, and (iii) failing to reduce HVAC system use during periods of low or zero occupancy, which can waste up to half of total energy spending. He justified the substantial proposed increases in the MCPS budget by acknowledging that for years MCPS has shortchanged the larger investments in building system upgrades that would dramatically reduce energy use. For these reasons, I support SB381.

Maryland counties spend increasing larger sums of money on heating and cooling school buildings each year. Understanding a building's annual energy use is an important first step to identify cost saving energy efficiency opportunities.

SB381 would require each county board of education to collect data on energy usage and report the data collected to the Interagency Commission on School Construction. That Commission would be required to specify the data to be collected and analyze that data to make recommendations for improving school building efficiency and usage. Collecting and analyzing the data allows for benchmarking, laying the groundwork for schools to reduce energy consumption and utility costs.

County school systems often lack the appropriate staff and funds to track these data. Maryland school systems can look to the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) which has several programs designed to help educational institutions engage in sustainable, clean energy projects. MEA's Decarbonizing Public Schools Program provides support to public schools for energy monitoring.

While SB381 requires only the initial steps of benchmarking, these steps will help Maryland public school systems create a baseline of energy usage data, enabling them to use MEA funds effectively to design a plan to reduce that usage, reduce energy costs, and free up funds for other investments in their school systems. Accordingly, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB381.