

March 23, 2026

RE: Favorable Testimony on Utility RELIEF ACT (HB1532)

Chair Feldman and Members of the Energy, Education, and Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Utility RELIEF Act ([HB1532](#)). Permit Power is a research and advocacy non-profit on a mission to make it easy, inexpensive, and safe for American families to power their lives with clean energy. We applaud key provisions of [HB1532](#) for both closing loopholes in the Brighter Tomorrow Act and developing new policies to allow more Maryland residents to go solar. We urge you to support the rooftop solar permitting provisions of HB1532 and refine the language to clarify and strengthen the bill.

Proposed amendments to § 1-1320 of the Local Government Article in the Utility RELIEF Act would streamline the process of getting approval from local government to install home solar and batteries while ensuring the safety of the systems. These provisions would allow solar installers to receive automated permits for systems that meet building safety codes, standardize many of the code requirements between one community and the next, shorten inspection timelines, and place reasonable limits on permitting fees.

Increasing access to home solar and batteries is an essential part of the solution to Maryland's growing energy affordability crisis. Monthly utility bills increased \$20 in many parts of the state last year alone due to skyrocketing wholesale rates and the build-out of energy-intensive data centers. Going solar provides homeowners with significant savings on utility bills – approximately \$2,300 annually. More distributed solar and batteries also lower costs for all ratepayers by reducing the need for expensive new grid infrastructure and peak power purchases. But right now, bureaucratic red tape and delays frequently block families from installing rooftop solar, and makes doing so more expensive.

Today, Maryland has the fourth slowest residential solar permitting timelines in the country – meaning that Maryland is behind many other states that lack real clean energy goals. Roughly one-in-eight home solar projects that begin the permitting process in Maryland are cancelled (data from [Ohm Analytics](#)), and solar installers cite permitting issues as the [largest reason](#) for the cancellations. Our recent [study](#) on permitting barriers in Maryland cited a local installer who measured the impacts of permitting bottlenecks and found that they would be able to install solar on roughly 50 percent more homes if those bottlenecks were eliminated.

To remove red tape obstructing families from installing rooftop solar, in 2024 the Legislature included a requirement in the Brighter Tomorrow Act for counties and municipalities to automate permitting, and the Maryland Energy Administration provided [\\$4 million in grants](#) to cover any costs of compliance. Automated permitting software asks the installer a series of technical questions to verify the system is up-to-code and then issues the permit instantly for construction to begin. Automated

permitting is live in hundreds of localities, representing roughly one-third of the national market. (See list from [SolarAPP+](#) and [Symbium](#). Many other large jurisdictions, such as Los Angeles, have adopted other platforms as well.) After passage of the Brighter Tomorrow Act, several counties and municipalities in Maryland responded by automating permitting, including Gaithersburg, Kent County, Montgomery County, Rock Hall, Rockville, Salisbury, and Worcester County. Others, such as Prince George's County, Wicomico County, and the City of Baltimore are taking steps to do so. While some jurisdictions are exempt because they do not conduct solar permitting at all, many other jurisdictions are exploiting a loophole and lack of enforcement in the Brighter Tomorrow Act to avoid compliance. We applaud HB1532 for closing that loophole by clearly defining "solar permitting software" and for giving the Attorney General the ability to enforce the law in § 1-1320(a)(6) and 1-1320(g) of the Local Government Article.

Legislating access to automated permitting for families looking to go solar is increasingly becoming a national best practice. Since 2022, California, Texas, and Florida, the country's three largest solar markets, have passed laws with the intent of universalizing access to automated permitting for consumers. Legislation signed last December in New Jersey will automate permitting statewide. This session, similar legislation cleared both houses in Virginia and is progressing in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

HB1532 builds on the Brighter Tomorrow Act, not only by ensuring that automated permitting will be implemented across Maryland, but by removing additional red tape inhibiting families from going solar. We strongly support additional provisions in the bill that would:

- Encourage remote inspections and set a cap of five business days on average for a jurisdiction to complete an inspection for a home solar project. (See § 1-1320(c)(2) of the Local Government Article.) [Remote inspections](#), which have become commonplace nationwide since COVID-19, increase safety, accelerate the energization timeline, reduce installation costs, and save resources for building departments.
- Base code compliance checks for projects that go through automated review on building safety codes. (See § 1-1320(a)(6)(i) of the Local Government Article.) This provision would appropriately focus review of residential rooftop solar systems on health and safety. It would also standardize many of the code requirements between communities. Similar legislation passed in [California](#) in 2014.
- Cap permitting fees at \$500 for projects that go through automated review. (See § 1-1320(c)(6)(ii) of the Local Government Article.) In addition to lowering the cost of solar by preventing egregious fees, this cap would allow installers to better plan and set expectations for homeowners. Similar legislation has passed in [California](#) and [Colorado](#).

The benefits of the policies that streamline solar permitting have been well documented. For instance, an independent peer reviewed [study](#) published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) found that streamlined permitting policies, at a level less robust than the policies in HB1532, increased new solar installations by 17 percent.

To fully realize these benefits, we suggest the following updates to HB1532:

- In § 1-1320(c)(5) of the Local Government Code, clarify that a locality can manually review permit applications approved by the automated software as part of a system-wide quality assurance audit, but not as an additional code compliance check after the automated software has issued the permit. We are concerned that the current language could create “double review,” whereby the software performs code compliance checks and then a reviewer also performs code compliance checks, which would add, rather than cut, red tape and consumer costs. Evidence shows that solar projects permitted via automated review have levels of code compliance that are higher than projects permitted via manual review. (See page 10 of this [report](#) by the National Laboratory of the Rockies.) Additionally, every project permitted via automated review undergoes inspection once built to ensure the system was constructed to code and is safe.
- In § 1-1320(c)(2)(iii), clarify that a locality can use a qualified third party to conduct a remote inspection, but not conduct an additional in-person inspection after the remote inspection has taken place. We are concerned that the current language could create a “double inspection,” whereby the locality performs a remote inspection and then a third party performs an in-person inspection, which again, would add, rather than cut, red tape and costs. [Evidence](#) shows that remote inspections are as safe or safer than in-person inspections.

We ask you to support affordable, clean energy for Maryland families by supporting and strengthening the rooftop solar permitting reforms in HB 1532.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Davis".

Benjamin Davis  
Chief of Policy