



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 17, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill 265: Community Solar Energy Generating Systems – Prohibited Locations – Adjacent 2 Parcels**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

Howard County is pleased to support SB265. Climate action and environmental justice are high priorities for Howard County. Our June 2023 *Climate Forward: Climate Action and Resiliency Plan* sets forth ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gases by 60% by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. Clean energy deployment is vital to meeting our climate goals, and as it is cheaper than fossil fuels, it also helps to improve energy affordability.

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.

Community solar programs ensure that the financial benefits of solar energy also reach residents who cannot install their own solar systems. These are often low- and moderate-income (LMI) residents. Community solar programs let households subscribe to a share of a larger solar system located elsewhere and buy solar electricity below standard utility rates. Howard County is currently in the process of developing its own community solar program for LMI residents in the BGE area.

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.

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.

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.



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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 facilitate clean energy deployment wherever possible. SB265 would promote community solar development by removing restrictions on using adjacent parcels for community solar projects if the combined total capacity exceeds 5 MW. This seemingly small amendment would make a difference because identifying land for solar generation can be a major challenge, limiting solar adoption. Solar installations need not be permanent and do not harm the land but rather allow soil to recuperate. Thus, current restrictions on adjacent parcels of suitable land that are available within the confines of other zoning and permitting rules appear unnecessary and arbitrary.

Now is the time to ensure that the clean energy transition does not leave out vulnerable communities that would most benefit. Community solar programs help democratize solar access and create cleaner and cheaper electricity for Marylanders. Howard County respectfully requests the Committee issue a favorable report for SB265.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive