



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Office of the Chief

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

Thomas E. Coe, Chief

HB1532 - Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act

DATE: March 23, 2026
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
POSITION: Support with Amendments
TESTIMONY FROM: Thomas E. Coe, Chief
Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services

Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee, I write today to voice safety concerns related to the implementation of HB1532 as currently written. Beginning on page 15, a portion of the bill aims to streamline the application and permitting process for solar energy systems, residential energy storage systems, main electrical panel upgrades and main electrical panel devices. Page 16 of the bill requires a county or municipality whose average in-person inspection time is greater than 5 days (over a 12-month period) to provide a remote inspection option.

Plan review and inspection ensure code compliance and works to maintain the safety of the occupants of a structure as well as those who may respond to emergencies within a structure. As it applies to solar installations, inspectors verify proper clearances, central access pathways, ridge clearance and access and ensures there are no ventilation obstructions. Verification of panel placement and mounting ensure that the correct brackets were installed to meet the wind and load requirements of the code. Additionally, inspectors ensure proper electrical panel connections, identify improper connections or accessory lug connections and ensure proper grounding and bonding conditions have been met to reduce the risk of electrical shock or arc flash incidents.

As we learned through our experience during COVID, remote or virtual inspections do not provide the same level of observation and review to ensure code compliance as in-person inspections do. Understanding and supporting the importance of efficiency and streamlining permitting processes, that should not be achieved at the expense of physical in-person inspections. I urge the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 1532.