



## TESTIMONY

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

**DATE:** March 25, 2026

**POSITION:** Favorable with Amendments

**BILL:** HB 1532

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) supports HB 1532 with amendment. While we support the overall goal of HB 1532 and Maryland's transition to renewable energy, this legislation as amended introduces an untenable 5-day inspection mandate that jeopardizes public safety and undermines local permitting authority (pages 14-18). By forcing a transition to mandatory remote inspections if arbitrary timelines are missed, the bill prioritizes industry speed over the structural and fire safety of Maryland residents.

The installation of a residential solar system is not a minor cosmetic upgrade; it involves significant structural loads and complex high-voltage electrical integration. While rooftop solar has been at the forefront of these discussions, the bill also applies to residential ground- and balcony-mounted solar.

These provisions impose a rigid requirement for local governments to complete in-person inspections for residential solar within five business days. No other area of Maryland permitting law imposes such a restrictive mandate that fails to consider the workload or staff resources of a local jurisdiction. By making the requirement based on completion of the inspection, the bill fails to account for delays caused by homeowners or contractors. This sets municipalities up for a mathematical failure beyond their control.

The bill also requires quarterly reporting on the average completion time. This requirement is an administrative unfunded mandate that pulls resources away from actual safety enforcement.

**The most concerning element of the bill is the "penalty" for missing the 5-day average: a permanent, mandatory shift to remote (photo/video) inspections.**

MML members have consistently voiced that remote inspections should be a tool, not a state-mandated standard. While some Maryland jurisdictions currently utilize remote inspections as a supplemental tool for minor, low-risk projects, they do so with the critical understanding that an in-person, spot-check inspection remains a constant possibility. This 'threat' of a physical inspection is the primary mechanism for maintaining contractor integrity and ensuring that the work performed matches the photos submitted. Without the accountability of a physical site visit, the state is effectively creating a trust-based system for high-voltage, structurally significant installations.

Once a jurisdiction misses this threshold, there is no clear or reasonable recourse to return to in-person inspections. This effectively creates a one-way door that strips safety officials of their authority to identify hazards that cameras cannot see.

While solar fires are rare, the National Fire Protection Association reports hundreds of incidents annually—and research shows that half of those are due to faulty installation.

Furthermore, by limiting all permit reviews strictly to "health and safety" requirements, the bill preempts the ability of local governments to protect the unique character of their communities. This "one-size-fits-all" approach renders local rules for Historic Districts and Main Streets unenforceable, as aesthetic and zoning compliance would no longer be valid grounds for review.

These provisions also cap local fees at \$500. We are not aware of anyone charging a higher fee than the cap proposed here. That said, MML generally opposes the practice of codifying static fees. Since fees, by law, can only cover the cost of services, establishing static caps will likely create a future divide between expenditures (software & staff) and revenues (capped fees). Since the proposed cap does not address any current problem, and we do not believe the intent is to require local governments to subsidize solar industry costs, we believe this provision has no place in State law.

Finally, the amendments introduce an unusual enforcement mechanism by authorizing the Attorney General to seek judicial action against a municipality for administrative non-compliance. Typically, the Attorney General's office is tasked with protecting broad public interests, such as consumer protection, civil rights, or environmental safety. Elevating a local permitting dispute, centered on software adoption and fee structures, to the level of Attorney General intervention is an unprecedented escalation. We believe that disputes regarding local administrative processes are best handled through existing local governance and judicial channels, rather than by involving the State's highest law enforcement office in routine local permitting matters.

**In conclusion, while the Maryland Municipal League supports the transition to a greener energy future and lower energy prices, the safety of our residents cannot be negotiated for the sake of administrative speed.**

For these reasons, the Maryland Municipal League respectfully requests a favorable with amendment report on HB 1532, striking the solar application and permitting provisions, starting on 17 on page 14 through line 22 on page 18.

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For more information relating to this piece of testimony, please contact:

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