

ENHANCED IMPACT LLC

Based in Great Mills, Maryland; serving clients leaving only footprints across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Favorable with Amendments Testimony for HB1532

Utility RELIEF Act

Education, Energy & Environment Committee

Hearing Date: March 3, 2026

Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am writing today in support of HB1532 Utility RELIEF Act due to a number of incorporated provisions including reform for residential Solar Energy Systems - Local Inspections and Permitting. In 2025, I founded Enhanced Impact LLC to support mission driven non-profit organizations and sustainable businesses across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. I am an adjunct instructor for a LEAD211 class *Exploring Environmental Advocacy* at St Mary's College of Maryland. I am also a proud homeowner in St Mary's County with rooftop solar and backup battery. My family has been able to enjoy the benefits of free fuel from the sun to power our home and charge my car. We have also used our local rural electric cooperative's EmPOWER program to get a home energy audit, receive professional energy savings advice free-of-charge, and reduced cost for insulation and weatherization of our 30 year old home. In short, my personal and professional experience with Maryland's renewable energy and energy efficiency programs gives me unique insight into what works and what needs improvement. I recommend certain changes to HB1532 to enhance its effectiveness.

The benefits of home solar energy systems should be as accessible as possible to all Marylanders. Despite living in the woods, my family enjoys much cheaper electrical bills than any of our neighbors because of the 30 solar panels on the roof and 9Kw backup battery in the garage. This is the case in the peak summer months and even in the cold months. Our home battery provides resiliency during storms and our first floor, kitchen appliances, interior bathrooms, HVAC heat pump, internet are all fully connected during power outages. The solar can still charge the battery when the grid is down so the resiliency returns every morning after a storm. HB1532 works to improve the local permitting and interconnection process to provide clarity on timeline and flexibility to encourage remote inspection options.

I encourage the committee to strengthen all of the provisions below to maximize flexibility for homeowners looking to save money through energy independence and efficiency.

Rooftop Solar and Energy Storage Provisions in Local Government Article - 1-1320.

Navigating the local permitting, inspection, and utility interconnection process for rooftop solar energy systems in St. Mary's County meant contending with a maze of paperwork and delays

before, during, and after installation of my 30 solar panels and 9kW battery. Any clerical error or small miscommunication led to massive delays. For example, my inspection paperwork was initially rejected because my husband's name was on the application for the SMECO account agreement instead of mine. My contractor fixed this in 5 minutes, but this issue alone set my project back 5 days.

The hidden costs of installation had financial implications including the delays in permitting, inspections, and interconnection. When my system was installed in 2018 we signed a contract in the spring, but it took until August to finally get our panels and a battery fully operational and storing clean energy. This was due to a variety of factors including slow county permitting, and then a waiting game where our system sat on our roof unconnected due to 14+ days of additional utility interconnection delays. As a result, we missed the crucial peak season for peak energy production, and the bill savings that come with it.

There were also procedures that involved multiple inspections, from both the county and the utility co-op. Someone had to be at home at the time and there's no time frame given so a person can estimate how many hours to take off of work. The same permitting and inspection quirks were true for our home EV charger installation 3 years ago. One time we failed an EV charger inspection because the inspector did not ring the doorbell to alert me to their arrival. I was working upstairs all day. The inspector left a small failure sticker on my front porch inches from the doorbell. **Given the scheduling demands for working families, I would expand the opportunity for remote inspection provisions to include additional home improvement inspection types.**

Additionally, I have worked on Brighter Tomorrow Act implementation campaigns encouraging local counties to adopt an automated permit processing software and lead a stakeholder group with Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) to determine the barriers to adoption. SolarAPP+ is free for counties to use and takes very little time to implement. MEA offered two rounds of grants and still very few counties took advantage of it, and over a dozen jurisdictions have begun using it without applying for the grant. **There is language that can now be deleted from statute as it is out of date.**

Amendment Recommendation:

Delete the following section on page 18 regarding reasons to delay implementation. This is from the current statute that passed in 2024 and the administration has already funded two rounds of grants in FY24 & FY25 supporting the implementation of SolarAPP, therefore it has already begun implementation. Additionally, under the new definitions of software in the above sections the need to verify updated software is no longer applicable.

PAGE 18 Delete Lines 9-14

[9 (2) as determined by the Administration, the automated software is no
10 longer updated or maintained.

11 (e) The Administration shall delay the initial implementation or suspend the
12 requirements of subsection (c) of this section if there are insufficient State or federal funds
13 available to the Administration to provide financial support to a county or municipality
14 implementing solar permitting software as defined in subsection (a)(5)(i) of this section.]

Portable Solar Systems in Public Utilities Article 7-321.

For families whose homes cannot outfit rooftop solar, a portable solar system is a great opportunity to enjoy those same benefits on a balcony or patio. I appreciate the inclusion of this provision, however, the scale of allowable solar energy systems is inconsistent with our neighboring states. Virginia's recently passed legislation uses 1200 Watts as the standard size for portable solar systems. Maryland should do no less.

As drafted, Maryland would set a bizarrely low standard for a portable system of 391 Watts. This is the power equivalent of about 4 incandescent bulbs, a small C-PAP machine, or perhaps a mini fridge, but not all of these items at once. A 391 watt size system is so small it cannot even power a single standard size refrigerator. To say, as the legislation states, that only one system is permissible per meter would mean that in a master metered apartment building, only one resident could have a system on their balcony. A 391 Watt system should not require utility notification or be limited to one resident per apartment building. **As drafted this provision would not bring the benefits of solar to Maryland residents who need it the most.**

Amendment Recommendation for PAGE 56-57

Add/Amend Definition to make it align with Virginia standards 7-321.

11 (A) IN THIS SECTION, "PORTABLE SOLAR ENERGY GENERATING SYSTEM"

12 MEANS A MOVABLE PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR ENERGY GENERATION DEVICE THAT IS:

13 (1) DESIGNED TO BE CONNECTED TO A BUILDING'S ELECTRICAL

14 SYSTEM THROUGH A STANDARD ELECTRICAL OUTLET;

15 (2) PRIMARILY INTENDED TO OFFSET PART OF THE BUILDING'S

16 ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION;

17 (3) LIMITED TO SUPPLYING A MAXIMUM POWER OUTPUT OF NOT

18 MORE THAN ~~391~~ **1200** WATTS

(4) includes a device or feature that prevents the device from affecting or exporting power to the electrical system of the building during a power outage ~~BACK TO THE ELECTRIC SYSTEM OF THE BUILDING; AND~~

19 ~~(4)~~**(5)** CERTIFIED BY UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY OR AN EQUIVALENT

20 NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED TESTING LABORATORY.

21 (B) A PERSON MAY PURCHASE AND INSTALL NOT MORE THAN ONE

22 PORTABLE SOLAR ENERGY GENERATING SYSTEM **PER ELECTRICAL OUTLET**~~PER~~

ELECTRIC METER FOR

23 RESIDENTIAL USE ONLY.

ADD

A small portable solar generation device that has a maximum power output to the receptacle outlet of not more than 391 watts is exempt from product listing provisions that would require notification to the electric utility or alterations to the building's premises, wiring, or electrical panels.

Data Centers

Data centers, particularly hyperscale data centers, are extremely energy intensive consuming enormous amounts of electricity and water. They have significant impacts on the electricity use, regional transmission, and local grid distribution systems. They have significant environmental impacts from back-up power generation and water use. They also introduce numerous new pollution sources in the form of air pollution, water consumption, stormwater runoff, light and noise pollution to our communities. The measures in HB1532 as drafted do not adequately protect Maryland residents from the impacts of data centers.

This land use type is subject to the boom and bust economy. Maryland needs to maintain protections such that data center sites do not drain finite resources. **The data center developer should be required to post a bond for the life of the entire structure and associated equipment equal to 100% of the decommissioning costs to return the site to its natural state.**

The costs on ordinary Marylanders, the energy use and the unquantified water use is highly alarming. I appreciate the work of this legislation in identifying some of the root causes of so much residential concern about data centers. However, this legislation does not properly motivate data center developers to comply with the intent language contained therein. Additionally, tax exemptions provided for data centers under current statute place the burden of paying taxes on the rest of the tax base. As such, I suggest amending the bill to add the substance of [HB0560](#) to provide taxpayer relief and [HB1411](#) to establish transparency beyond intent.

Amendment Recommendation for PAGE 26

Add language on PAGE 26 and renumbering III & IV to include water resource management and using best available technology for minimizing power use and water demand such as geothermal.

Subsection (G) ADD

III. PROVIDE WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FOR THE DATA CENTER THROUGH:

- (1) Coordination with interstate commissions on water resource management
- (2) Public disclosure of quantity of daily water use
- (3) Maximizing the use of non-potable water
- (4) Demonstrating the use of cooling technologies that lessen water demand

IV. Using best available technology for minimizing power use and cooling needs such as networked geothermal.

EmPOWER Program

EmPOWER Program is Maryland's flagship energy efficiency program, which has saved ratepayers money both directly in the form of rebates, free and reduced cost upgrades, and in the form of lessening grid strain and the need for costly upgrades, plus the cost savings of lessened health risks from reduced air pollution. The EmPOWER program has been updated several times since its initial passage in 2008 to improve the program, better align it with our climate goals, and increase access to low-income families. I appreciate the work to identify areas for cost containment on all line items on utility bills, however, in the EmPOWER program, we can find ways to lower costs

without substantially cutting the goals and meat of the program. During times of high utility bills, we need to ensure that our energy efficiency goals are as high as ever since every kWh not used is a savings for all of us and our strained grid.

Adding Community Solar and distributed solar into EmPOWER will needlessly complicate the calculations for each utility and is unrelated to the utility's energy efficiency efforts. Additionally, because of the clarification in paragraph 2, it is clear that the intent of the general assembly is not to allow utilities to build generation projects. An area that would be more aligned with the intent of the bill would be to count distribution system grid enhancing technologies towards GHG reduction targets. As such, I would recommend amendments to strengthen and realign EmPOWER.

Amendment Recommendation for PAGE 51

Amend technologies that would count towards GHG reductions. Grid enhancing technologies would be more aligned with the intent of the bill to encourage distribution system grid enhancing technologies than community solar.

7-223.

(II) FOR 2027 THROUGH 2029 SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPH (3) OF
9 THIS SUBSECTION, FOR 2027 THROUGH 2029, NOT MORE THAN 20% OF THE
10 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS COUNTED TOWARD EACH ELECTRIC
11 COMPANY'S GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS REDUCTION TARGETS ESTABLISHED
12 UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL INCLUDE:

13 1. ~~COMMUNITY SOLAR ENERGY GENERATION~~ GRID ENHANCING TECHNOLOGY THAT IS
14 INTERCONNECTED TO THE ELECTRIC COMPANY'S DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM; AND
15 2. ~~SOLAR ENERGY GENERATION FACILITIES~~ OR TECHNOLOGIES INSTALLED ON WIRES
AND POLES AT THE SUBSTATION LEVEL THAT ARE
16 INTERCONNECTED TO THE ELECTRIC COMPANY'S DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosa E. P. Hance

Rosa E. P. Hance

Founder

[Enhanced Impact LLC](#)

Great Mills, Maryland