



Testimony: [HB1040](#) - Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund - Mandated Uses - Climate Change Programs
Hearing Date: March 3, 2026
Bill Sponsor: Delegate Stein
Committee: Environment and Transportation, Appropriations
Submitting: Liz Feighner, Emmanuel UMC, Laurel
Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton and committee members,

My name is Liz Feighner and I am the Green Team Chair at [Emmanuel United Methodist Church](#) in Laurel in Howard County, District 13. The Green Team's mission statement is to guide Emmanuel United Methodist Church on a path to greater environmental responsibility through education and ecologically sustainable practices that recognizes our stewardship of God's creation.

On behalf of Emmanuel UMC, I urge you to vote favorably on **HB1040 - Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund - Mandated Uses - Climate Change Programs** which would bring discipline and predictability to how we use the Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund. It mandates that the SEIF continue to require that at least 40% of the SEIF spending go to low-and-moderate income households and overburdened, underserved communities.

The [social principles of the United Methodist Church](#) declare that, "We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God's goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God's creation. Rather than treating creation as if it were placed here solely for humanity's use and consumption, we are called to practice responsible stewardship and to live in right relationship with the Creator and with the whole of God's creation... We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought."

In our efforts to be responsible stewards, we have tried to offset our carbon footprint over the years, including:

- buying "green energy" (wind RECS) through third-party electricity suppliers and encouraging our members to do the same for their homes
- joining a community solar farm and encouraging our members to sign up for community solar instead of buying wind RECs, a program that did not work as intended
- upgrading our building envelope for improved energy efficiency
- upgrading to LED lighting
- installing programmable thermostats
- planting trees and maintaining our rain gardens

Installing solar at our facility would make a significant difference in being a good steward, but that option has always been out of reach for our church because of the upfront costs. However, the passage of the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#) allowed nonprofits to take advantage of the federal tax incentives through a direct-payment program. That reduces the total cost by 30-40%, but it is still a huge lift for faith communities. [Interfaith Power and Light DMV](#) alerted us to the [FY26 Commercial Solar and Canopy](#) grant which would bring the cost of installing solar at our facility truly within our reach. This grant was available to businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations located in communities classified as low-to-moderate income or overburdened.

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This grant program run by MEA and funded by the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) was critical in our ability to install solar and reduce our utility bills by up to 90%. So instead of sending our dollars to BGE we could use those funds for our advocacy work, helping our community and those in need as well as helping Maryland meet its climate mandates.

Unfortunately, the program ran out of funds before MEA was able to process our application. The program was first come, first serve and ran out of money within a month, when it was originally slated to run for about three months. This grant funding totaled \$13 million, but within a month, \$18.8 million had been requested, and MEA had to close the application portal. We understand that other faith communities also were unable to receive the grant. In addition, the solar company that had made proposals lost proposed projects and income for their workers. The closing of this program ended many proposed projects for the solar company, and led our congregation to curtail planned outreach priorities.

Emmanuel UMC has been part of the Scaggsville/Laurel Community since the 1880's. We serve not only our congregation, but the community as a whole. We operate a pre-school, Emmanuel Methodist Preschool, with full-time summer child care for the community. We sponsored sheltering for the homeless as part of the Winter Shelter program. Through our partnership with the [Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services](#), we also have a short-term apartment in our ministry center for those transitioning to stable housing.

Our church supports local food banks and also has school-supplies and clothing drives. We provide support to [Little Flowers Early Childhood and Development Center, Inc.](#), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in Baltimore, which provides child-care services to low-income children and families. We also have committed to support [Bridges to Housing Stability](#) by becoming the first [Stable Homes Sponsor](#). Emmanuel United Methodist Church is making a lasting impact on two Howard County families with children. Our sponsorship helps maintain two of Bridges' affordable homes, with a goal of maintaining 10 affordable homes. Our sponsorship provides stability and support for families that have experienced homelessness and are working toward self-sufficiency.

Emmanuel UMC also applied for the [FY26 Electrifying Community Buildings Grant Program](#) to replace our 1950's oil boiler and oil-sourced water heater with heat pumps and a heat-pump water heater at 50% of the total cost. This project is substantial and the cost has been prohibitive for years. While we are extremely grateful to learn recently that we were awarded this grant, leveraging the remaining 50% is still a huge burden. Funding for the grant program could have provided a larger share of the cost for that project if more SEIF funds were allocated to it. Additionally, this program is available as a result of Governor Moore's commitment to invest \$50 million for grants to electrify hospitals, schools, multi-family housing, and other community buildings. We need a more permanent SEIF investment for the Electrifying Community Buildings grant program.

Demand is great for clean-energy projects for nonprofits and low-income families, and we respectfully request that the SEIF be protected and adequately funded. We request it be used only for clean-energy projects, such as low-income home energy-efficiency pilot programs (including heat pumps, window heat pumps and heat pump hot-water heaters), residential, community and canopy solar, electric school buses, and an induction-stove pilot program.

For these reasons, we **support HB1040** and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report.

Respectively submitted,

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