



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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The Honorable Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 620**: Commemorative Months – Maryland Climate Education Month

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee:

Howard County is a leader on climate action. Early in my Administration in February 2019, I signed the “We Are Still In Declaration,” aligning Howard County’s climate efforts with the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate. Also in 2019, we became the first county in the nation to accept the U.S. Climate Alliance’s Natural & Working Lands Challenge, committing to implementation of nature-based climate solutions to help reach net zero emissions through carbon storage in healthy soils, forests, meadows, and farmland. This is good for both agriculture and our quality of life.

In signing our 2020 solar Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), we undertook the largest solar PPA in the state to develop rooftop, ground-mount, and parking canopy projects on public and private lands in Howard County. Those projects now generate about 32 million kWh of electricity annually, enough to meet more than half of the electricity needed by all Howard County government buildings. Over the 25-year term of this PPA Howard County will save well over \$30 million in energy costs.

Our leadership and commitment on climate were 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. We were the first county in the nation to earn this prestigious designation.

In 2023 I launched our bold “*Climate Forward: Climate Action and Resiliency Plan*,” which is our roadmap toward achieving our ambitious goals of reducing greenhouse gases by 60% by 2030 and reaching net-zero emissions by 2045. Clean energy deployment is integral to our Climate Forward plan and 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.

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, last December the SolSmart organization awarded its highest “Platinum” designation to Howard County, making us just the eighth local government in the nation to earn this designation.

We have made good progress to implement our Climate Forward Plan through a “whole-of-government” approach. We have reduced climate pollution by 26% compared to our 2005 base year by advancing renewable energy, public transportation, EV deployment, and EV charging infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and bolstering climate resiliency.

Recognizing that government alone cannot solve the climate crisis, we have also embarked on a “whole-of-community” approach through partnerships with various state and local agencies, non-profits, the private sector, and our residents to advance climate action across our county. We are undertaking a second solar PPA in partnership with Howard County Community College and the Howard County Public School System. We also executed a July 2025 Memorandum of Understanding with the Columbia Association (CA) to forge closer collaboration on climate and sustainability. Toward that end, on February 27 Howard County and CA launched our “Sustainability Partners Action Network” to help spur deeper climate and sustainability collaboration among a wide cross-section of county organizations and individuals.

Public education and awareness of climate issues are crucial to advancing climate progress. In Howard County, we are fortunate to have climate education programs such as the Youth Climate Institute and Students Branching Out, as well as our CleanScapes and Plastic Reduction and Environmental Protection grant programs to support action by local residents and non-profits.

Designating each April as Climate Education Month as called for by HB-620 will boost awareness of climate change and encourage our communities to step up their efforts toward achieving the state’s climate goals. This impactful, annual reminder will be a rallying point for climate action. Working together, Marylanders can lead the way to solve the climate crisis, improve the health of our communities and ecosystems, and make our economy stronger, resilient, and competitive.

I appreciate and support HB-620 and welcome its aims to raise awareness and inspire action towards Maryland’s climate goals. **We respectfully request that your committee issue a favorable report for HB-620.** Thank you.

Respectfully,



Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive