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Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB887 - Electric Generation – Transition From Fossil Fuels – Carbon Dioxide Emissions Rate and Transition Account

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 25, 2020

Bill Contact: Senator Chris West

To: The Honorable Delores G. Kelly, Chair, Finance Committee, and Committee Members

DoTheMostGood—Montgomery Country (DTMG) is a progressive grassroots organization with more than 1600 members who live in a wide range of communities from Bethesda near the DC line north to Germantown and beyond, and from Potomac east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep its members healthy and safe in a clean environment. Burning coal to make electricity is a dirty, 19th century technology that is a leading contributor to air pollution, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland. Eighty-eight percent of Marylanders live in counties unable to meet clean air smog standards set by the US Environmental Protection Agency. DTMG strongly supports SB887 to transition Maryland away from burning coal for electricity because SB887 will lead to improved health, cleaner air, and cleaner water for all of Maryland's residents, and it will help address climate change.

Air pollution from coal-fired power plants is linked to asthma, cancer, heart and lung ailments, neurological problems, increased annual health costs, and premature deaths. Coal-fired power plants release toxins, such as arsenic, lead, mercury, selenium, nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulfur dioxides (SO₂), volatile organic compounds which form ozone, and carbon monoxide as well as particulate matter (PM) into the air. Once these pollutants enter the air from coal plant stacks, they can disperse and cause harm over large areas. Lead and mercury are neurotoxins, particularly for children. Mercury released from power plants settles into the environment, spreading into groundwater and entering our food chain. Maryland is one of the 49 states in the US with fish consumption advisories due to high mercury concentrations in freshwater bodies. NOx compounds and SO₂ cause smog, irritate lung tissue, and exacerbate asthma; they also contribute to acid rain, which damages crops and acidifies lakes and streams. Since it can penetrate deep into the lungs, PM, better known as "soot," is linked to chronic bronchitis, aggravated asthma, stroke, heart attacks, and premature death. Air pollution from coal-fired power plants also disproportionately affects lower income and minority communities. For example, the Brandon Shores Generating Station and the H. A. Wagner Generating Station are co-located on the same site, polluting the same community, in northern Anne Arundel County just south of the Baltimore City border.

Coal-fired power plants also cause water pollution in Maryland. Coal plants are the number one source of toxic pollution in the nation's waterways, and coal ash has contaminated groundwater at nearly every coal-fired power plant site in the country. Five of Maryland's six coal-fired power plants

operated for years with expired water discharge permits and water pollution standards that dated to the 1980s. In 2018, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) finalized water pollution permits for the Morgantown Generating Station near Newburg, the Chalk Point Generating Station near Aquasco, and the Dickerson Generating Station in Montgomery County; these facilities will now be required to install pollution control measures to reduce discharge of dangerous coal byproducts into waterways that feed into the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River, and the Patuxent River by November 1, 2020. However, even with the updated permits, the plants are still among the largest polluters in the state. Although the 2018 permits follow EPA guidance, they do not preclude the dumping of toxic coal by-product pollutants, such as arsenic, selenium and mercury, into our waterways, and the Trump Administration has moved to free power plants from regulations that keep our water clean. The other three coal plants in Maryland are operating without modern pollution controls that provide a safeguard for smog-forming nitrogen oxides.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from coal-fired power plants, including CO₂, methane, and NO_x, are also significant contributors to climate change. In 2017, the six coal burning power plants in Maryland emitted GHG equivalent to more than 2 million cars, which is more than 40% of the passenger vehicles on the road in Maryland. In 2018, the Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) recommended that the state develop and implement a coal community transition plan for a just and responsible environmental and economic transition away from coal in Maryland's electricity sector. Communities with coal plants and workers must be included in developing the strategies and programs that will launch them into the clean energy economy and ensure protection of their families and interests. These plans must allow impacted industry and union workers to receive access to training programs and clean energy-related economic opportunities that provide good-paying, family-sustaining, union jobs. New York and Washington state have developed and implemented coal community transition plans, and initiatives are moving forward in many other states, such as Montana and Colorado.

Since the MCC recommendation in 2018, scientists from around the world have issued increasingly urgent warnings about the causes and dangers of climate change due to man-made GHG emissions. Emission of GHG must be significantly reduced in the next decade in order to meet the pressing reality of climate change. SB887 addresses this need by phasing in a requirement that CO₂ emissions from Maryland's six coal-fired power plants shall not exceed 180 pounds of CO₂ per million BTUs of energy produced. The phasing starts with Maryland's oldest coal-fired plants, Chalk Point, Dickerson, and H.A. Wagner, in 2023, followed by the Morgantown plant in 2024, the Brandon Shores plant in 2025, and the Warrior Run plant in 2030. Although it is theoretically possible that carbon-capture technologies could be developed and installed in the plants to meet this limit, such technologies are not currently available, and in reality, SB887 will result in the phased closure of Maryland's remaining coal-fired power plants. The proposed phasing provides time to plan and ensures that the electric grid and affected communities can adjust to the closures gradually. SB887 also includes retraining, retirement assistance, and wage-gap assistance to individuals transitioning from employment at the retiring coal-fired plants, to ease the burden on affected families and communities.

There is strong support across Maryland for eliminating the state's reliance on coal-fired power plants. A poll of Maryland voters in October, 2019, showed widespread support among Democrats, Republicans, and independents in all regions of the state for a transition to clean energy sources, and for state-sponsored programs to retrain people who work in coal plants and hold harmless the jurisdictions that rely on the plants for tax revenues. Survey respondents not only saw the benefit to the environment of transitioning away from coal, but for utility rates, jobs and the economy, and reliability of the electric grid.

Coal-fired generation of electricity in Maryland is already declining significantly; in 2017, Maryland's in-state coal plants provided only about 13% of the state's gross electricity consumption. Under the terms of the 2019 Clean Energy Jobs Act, which will double renewable fuel use in the state by 2030, there should be enough energy generated by renewables to make coal essentially obsolete by the mid-2020's. SB887 is the missing piece of the puzzle to put Maryland on a path to cleaner air, cleaner water, and a healthier population by severely limiting GHG emissions from or retiring Maryland's six remaining dirty coal-fired power plants.

Therefore, DTMG strongly supports SB887 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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