

Committee: Appropriations
Testimony on: HB0630 “School District Energy Use – Policy and Study”
Submitted by: Donald M. Goldberg, Executive Director
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 17, 2021

Climate Law & Policy Project strongly supports HB630 “School District Energy Use – Policy and Study” and urges a favorable report.

HB630 would require to:

- adopt or update their energy policies;
- monitor key indicators of energy consumption, efficiency, renewable energy, and greenhouse gas emissions;
- report annually on these indicators using a standardized template; and
- set targets for increasing reliance on renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

HB630 also requires the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IACSC) to coordinate with the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) and the Maryland Clean Energy Center (MCEC) to study and make recommendations on how to: (1) expand the Maryland Net Zero Energy School Initiative Grant Program; and (2) provide additional funding for the program. The IACSC must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly before December 1, 2021.

Maryland schools need up-to-date clean energy policies

Maryland has made public school investment one of its highest priorities. Maryland is also a leading State in its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. School districts are often the largest energy consumers and emitters of greenhouse gases within their districts. Thus, it is critically important that school investment be aimed at making school energy use as clean and efficient as possible. The first, and most important, step is for schools to adopt good clean energy policies.

Clean energy policies are good not only for the environment and student health; they save schools money. HB630 will reduce schools’ operating costs by ensuring they acquire the information they need to improve efficiency, reduce fuel consumption and maintenance costs and adopt onsite renewable power generation. The resulting savings can be used to fund other vital school educational priorities.

A review of the energy policies in all 23 Counties and the City of Baltimore school districts found that most are woefully out of date. Many were adopted in the 1990s, and some date back as far as the 1970’s. Many are simple statements proclaiming a “commitment to conservation.” With one exception — Baltimore City Schools — none of the school district energy policies have quantified targets for energy efficiency, use of renewable resources, or reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Maryland must build more net zero energy schools

A net zero energy school is one that produces as much clean energy as it consumes, or more. HB630 would require the Interagency Commission on School Construction to coordinate with the MEA and the

MCEC to study and make recommendations on how to expand and provide funding for the Maryland Net Zero Energy Schools Initiative.

This initiative has already provided \$9 million of Volkswagen settlement money to fund the construction of three new net zero energy schools in Maryland. The first to be completed, Wilde Lake Middle School, began operation in January 2017. The new school increased capacity to 760 students from the previous capacity of 500 students while using 50% less energy overall compared to the school it replaced.

Wild Lake's performance has exceeded its design specifications. In its first year of operation, Wilde Lake's roof and ground mounted solar panels produced 821,000 kWh of energy, almost twice what the school consumed (428,000 kWh). The extra energy was sold back to the grid, providing the school with additional money for its operating budget. While it cost Maryland \$2.7 million to make Wilde Lake a net zero energy school, Wilde Lake will see savings well beyond that amount in its many years of operation.

The costs of building net zero energy schools continue to drop, and builders and designers report that the cost of building a net zero school today can actually be lower than the cost of building a conventional school. This is because the high efficiency of net school reduces the size of the mechanical equipment needed to serve them.

We are confident that the study by the IACSC, MEA and MCEC will find that net zero energy schools are available and affordable today, as proven by the success of Maryland's Wilde Lake Middle School.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report from the Committee on HB630.