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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB296 “Whole-Home Repairs Act of 2023”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 14, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB296. This legislation seeks to improve the manner in which state and federal funding is made available for whole-home repairs for low-income families.

Many low-income homes and apartments in Maryland need significant investment to be healthy and habitable. They often have lead paint, structural defects, inefficient or inoperable heating and cooling equipment, inadequate electrical service, and other health hazards. This results, among other things, in increased cases of asthma, falls for the elderly, and lead poisoning for youth.

In addition, most low-income housing units utilize inefficient gas appliances and HVAC (heating and air conditioning) systems, and lack structural measures to promote energy efficiency. This results in high energy burdens for low-income households (on average, they spend 12% of their income on energy versus 2% for the general population).¹ In 2021, the Maryland Commission on Climate Change called for electrifying all low-income homes by 2030 to significantly limit greenhouse gas emissions owing to the current widespread use of natural gas.²

A principal goal of SB296 is to coordinate existing state and federal programs that fund efforts to make low-income housing units habitable and healthy. The current multiplicity of grants and rebates can be daunting to apply for, which reduces their utility.

We also support the amendment filed by the sponsor of the cross-filed House bill (HB79, sponsored by Delegate Stewart) to expand the range of state and federal programs included in this coordination of home repair programs, so as to include programs that promote energy efficiency and shifting from gas to electric appliances and HVAC systems. We also support adding the addition of greenhouse gas reduction as a goal of the bill, which is another provision included in Delegate Stewart’s amendment.

For these reasons, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on this bill.

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¹ Maryland Office of People’s Counsel, Maryland Low-Income Market Characterization Report - 2022 Report Update, September 2022, Table 2.1, https://opc.maryland.gov/Portals/0/Publications/Reports/Maryland%20Low-Income%20Market%20Characterization_September%202022%20final.

² Maryland Commission on Climate Change, 2021 Annual Report and Building Energy Transition Plan, page 8, <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Pages/MCCCReports-Archive.aspx>.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.