



Montgomery County Sierra Club  
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Testimony to Montgomery County Delegation Joint House and Senate Priorities Hearing – Local issues  
November 13, 2023

Good evening Chair Palakovich Carr, Chair Kramer and members of the delegation. Thank you very much for your work on our behalf. My name is Darian Unger, and I am the chair of the Montgomery County Sierra Club.

Tonight, I would like to share with you three of our local environmental priorities for the upcoming session, which complement our larger, state-wide climate change and energy priorities.

The first local priority is for better oversight of investor-owned utilities in land use matters. Under current law, utilities in the bicounty region are given the same status as government agencies during the development review process. And unlike every other jurisdiction in Maryland, our Montgomery and Prince George's County planning boards' role is merely advisory and they lack the authority to oversee planning and zoning aspects of utilities' projects. Bicounty legislation is needed to repeal this provision.

Our second local priority is for the General Assembly to take action to address the problem of light pollution. Poor outdoor lighting practices waste energy, hurt pedestrian safety and are harmful to both human health and our ecosystem. Legislation is needed to expand on the existing law that was passed in 2011 to include bicounty agencies and state roads, and we appreciate Delegate Wilkins' work on this issue.

The final local priority I'll mention is the need to transfer ownership and control of state roads to the county. State roads are the places where we see most of our pedestrian and bicycle injuries and fatalities. State roads are where many of our Ride On bus routes run and where the county is planning bus rapid transit. Transferring control and funding to the county will allow a more responsive, local Department of Transportation to help us achieve transit, pedestrian and bicycle safety and vision zero goals more quickly. This will both save lives and promote more sustainable transportation. It will also put us on par with local governments in Baltimore City, Washington DC, and Alexandria, which have full control over their roads.

Finally, we'll see you again soon on statewide issues, where the Maryland Sierra Club will continue supporting statewide bills on our climate crisis, the EmPOWER Maryland program, altering our transportation trust fund formula to account for "vehicle miles traveled," beverage container recycling, addressing the Metro funding crisis, and ranked choice voting.

Our entire executive committee and our thousands of members look forward to working with you in the upcoming weeks and months.