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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB228 – “High Performance and Green Buildings – Alterations (Green Building Restoration Act)”

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Hearing Date: January 21, 2021

The Sierra Club respectfully requests a “favorable with amendments” report on SB228.

We support the intent and purpose of this legislation. We agree that it is critical to ensure that buildings that receive state funds are constructed to a high standard which includes design elements that drastically reduce environmental impacts and minimize climate pollution.

In this regard, the most recent Annual Report from the Maryland Commission on Climate Change addressed the issue of how the state should “green” its buildings, recommending that:

The General Assembly should require that all new state-owned buildings and major renovations to existing state-owned buildings use efficient electric systems for primary space and water heating unless granted an exception based on cost or building characteristics that would make an electric system impractical, including existing use of district heat or combined heat and power. This requirement should apply to projects covered by the Maryland High Performance Building Act.¹

Accordingly, we strongly recommend that this legislation be amended to provide that all buildings covered by its provisions be required to utilize all-electric heating systems and appliances, in addition to meeting other high-performance building requirements. This may be accomplished by adding an amendment to Section 3–602.1(a)(2) of the State Finance and Procurement Article to specify that a “high performance building” “does not combust fossil fuels on-site for the provision of thermal energy to the building.”

The direct combustion of fossil fuels like oil, propane, and gas for building heating systems and other appliances is one of the top-five sources of climate pollution in Maryland. The Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland Commission on Climate Change have identified the construction and retrofit of efficient, all-electric buildings as a critical tool to meet our climate action laws. Maryland must move to all-electric buildings quickly, and all buildings constructed or undergoing major retrofits should be required to meet an all-electric standard.

¹ Maryland Commission on Climate Change 2020 Annual Report, at 31.

<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/Documents/MCCCAnnualReport2020.pdf>.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

We support SB228 and request that it be reported “favorable with amendments” to align with the recommendations of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change.

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