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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB250 “Climate Crisis Plan – Requirement”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 9, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB250 to require each Maryland county to prepare a “climate crisis plan.” As explained below, we suggest one clarification to the bill to harmonize it with the provisions of last year’s Climate Solutions Now Act.

As set forth in the bill, the new plans will need to include a variety of county actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and thus mitigate climate change. These actions will include, among other things, increasing the use of renewable energy, providing for buildings (existing and new) to be all-electric, transitioning to zero-emission county vehicles, providing for public transportation, and designing infrastructure to promote biking, walking, and carpools. Counties also will need to develop climate adaptation measures.

In recent years, Maryland has taken multiple steps to address climate change. This includes passage last year of the Climate Solutions Now Act, which sets goals for greenhouse gas emission reductions of 60% (compared to 2006) by 2031 and net-zero emissions by 2045, and details a number of actions the State will undertake to achieve these goals. In previous sessions, the General Assembly acted to increase solar and offshore-wind electricity generation, and required the Public Service Commission in factor climate change into all its energy-related decisionmaking.

The State’s aggressive climate goals will necessitate a continuing appraisal and reappraisal of the actions needed to be taken at all levels of government to mitigate climate change. That essential truth is embodied in the Climate Solutions Now Act, which requires that the state develop a plan this year for how Maryland will attain the 60% emissions reduction by 2031, and also establishes several work groups to analyze next steps. Currently, however, there is no requirement that county governments join and contribute to these efforts.

This bill seeks to remedy that gap by requiring county climate plans be adopted by January 1, 2025. In so doing, the bill balances two important interests: that of the State to ensure that county plans are comprehensive and efficacious; and that of the counties to make judgments based on local conditions and resources. The bill establishes a policy framework for the plans by identifying the specific types of actions to be included, requires counties to fill in the specifics, and provides for the Maryland Department of the Environment to provide feedback to the counties on their draft plans and for counties to address that feedback when they finalize their plans.

Our suggested clarification concerns the relationship between the bill’s proposed requirement that county plans “establish[] greenhouse gas reduction targets” and the greenhouse gas

reduction targets enacted last year in the Climate Solutions Now Act (a 60% reduction compared to the 2006 level by 2031, and net-zero emissions by 2045). Clearly, the county reduction targets will need to be consistent with the Statewide targets, while also taking into account local conditions. Accordingly, we suggest appropriate language be added to specify that the county reduction targets should support, or be consistent with, the statewide targets.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on this legislation.

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