

Policy Position of the Advocates for Herring Bay¹
Regarding SB 926: Climate Solutions Act of 2020—Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act
Statement Submitted by Kathy Gramp
February 19, 2020

Support with an amendment

Supporting SB 926 and proposing additional language to initiate a pilot program for economic incentives for installing community and other solar systems on preferred surfaces

We applaud the sponsors of SB 926 for taking a multi-pronged approach to reducing Maryland’s carbon dioxide emissions. The bill addresses the state’s major sources of emissions and builds on our ability to use natural resources like forests to sequester carbon. One of the key provisions—requiring solar energy systems on large rooftops—promotes the dual goals of decarbonizing the grid while reducing the loss of forests and other lands that sequester carbon.

Coupling this rooftop directive with economic incentives would allow Maryland to maximize the use of rooftops and other surfaces that sequester little or no carbon for solar facilities. Other states are showing it can be done. New Jersey recently approved over 77 MW_{dc} of community solar on impervious and impaired surfaces, and over 20 percent of the new solar capacity in Massachusetts is from non-greenfield projects.² It’s time for Maryland to catch up to its peers.

We urge you to jump-start the diversity of Maryland’s in-state solar generation so we can optimize the emissions reductions that will accrue from meeting the 2028 deadline in the RPS. Specifically, we suggest adding language to SB 926 to direct the Public Service Commission to implement a pilot program of economic incentives modeled on those in other states, which have allocated some of the financial benefits of SRECs and other pricing differentials to projects on rooftops, parking lots, landfills, reclaimed mines, and brownfields. Since many rooftops and impaired sites are relatively small, we suggest including community solar as well as other projects in the pilot program. Finally, launching the incentive program by 2022 would give the Commission nearly two years to complete the necessary proceedings. An illustrative example of legislative language for an amendment is shown below.

With this amendment, SB 926 will help put Maryland on a path toward reducing its carbon emissions on a holistic basis. We urge the Committee to favorably report this bill, including our proposed amendment.

Example of potential legislative language

Amend Article 2 (Public Utilities) to include the following:

Not later than December 31, 2022, the Commission shall implement a pilot program of economic incentives for community and other solar projects located on impervious and previously developed surfaces. In developing this pilot program, the Commission shall consider approaches being used by other states to provide predictable and long-term economic incentives for installing solar energy systems on such sites.

¹ The Advocates for Herring Bay is a community-based environmental group in Anne Arundel County.

² For a list of the New Jersey projects, see <https://www.nj.gov/bpu/pdf/boardorders/2019/20191220/12-20-19-8D.pdf>.