

Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: HB 1290 - "Public School Construction – Funding and Administration"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable, with Amendments

Hearing Date: March 1, 2022



Dear Ms. Chairwoman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of HB 1290, which concerns Public School Construction – Funding and Administration. Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in our schools and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we are currently working directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a Climate Action Plan for PGCPS.

There are a good number of provisions in this bill that are quite valuable, but we wish to focus on the additional match funds for net-zero schools, since that is our area of expertise and advocacy.

In a 2019 Report from the US Green Building Council that looked at net-zero buildings in a northeastern state, a variety of different buildings were examined, but most germane to HB 1290, schools.¹ The study looked at a life cycle cost analysis of schools. This study assumed an upfront cost of \$365/GSF based on an existing net-zero school, which is slightly higher than \$320/GSF, which is what the net-zero Wilde Lake was constructed for. Despite the upfront costs, the energy use at the net-zero school decreased by 45%, and they projected that net-zero schools would break-even after 13-16 years with a 3-9% decrease in the total cost of ownership over 30 years. This is proof that wise upfront costs pay dividends to the taxpayer and should be encouraged through increased funding.

But is this transferable to Maryland? PGCPS has shown that nearly fossil fuel free schools are not just possible, but are often the best decision financially. PGCPS is relying on a new financing model for six new schools. Of these six schools five will be heated and cooled using geothermal systems rather than fossil fuel, and geothermal was chosen because it was the option that made the most economic sense in light of the 30 year total cost of ownership calculations required by the IAC. It is not just alternatively financed schools where this is possible, PGCPS constructed six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school with geothermal heating using conventional financing.

However, while PGCPS has shown that fossil fuel free heating and cooling is economical, when it comes to the other side of net-zero, the installation of solar panels, the upfront costs become a bit prohibitive. They have found success installing solar when additional grant funding is available, but it is more often than not that grant funding cannot be found, which leaves potential net-zero schools lacking solar power. By providing an additional 5% in funding for net-zero schools this could allow for additional upfront costs to be surmountable.

While we have focused on the additional funding for net-zero schools, the other provisions proposed under § 5-303 (k)(3) will go to benefit communities that have been historically disadvantaged in terms of receiving new or rebuilt schools. These buildings often have intractable problems with mold and lead and are often the biggest

¹ US Green Building Council. "Zero Emissions Buildings in Massachusetts: Saving Money from the Start" <https://builtenvironmentplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ZeroEnergyBldgMA2019.pdf>

wasters of energy too. These provisions will be beneficial to correct for injustices that have plagued school capital project decisions in Maryland.

Concerning amendments, unless there is reasoning otherwise, we recommend several additional items to be required to be inspected for under § 5-310 (b)(2)(ii) namely mold and lead in drinking water. Indoor air quality suffers immensely when mold is airborne and numerous schools have mold problems in Prince George's among other jurisdictions. Lead in pipes that leach into water is also common in older schools and sometimes the most likely pathway for lead exposure for young people. Relatedly, we recommend that § 5-310 (b)(1)(ii)(C) should include identifying schools likely to have leaching lead pipes in addition to lead paint.

Every Maryland child needs access to a healthy learning environment and shouldn't have to mortgage their futures so that we don't have to move to the more cost effective technologies of the future. HB 1290 goes a long way to reduce multiple problems facing our schools and our children will thank you for this work.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report, with **AMENDMENT**, for this important legislation.