

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support (with amendments) of bill 44-21, Green Bank-Funding-Fuel Energy Tax Revenue (Green Buildings Now Act). We believe that this bill, while not adequate on its own, provides an important step towards helping the County meet the goals set in the Climate Emergency Resolution.

For several years 350 Montgomery County has been in conversation with local and regional advocates for climate justice and equity. As a part of this effort, we co-founded the MoCo Green New Deal project to advocate for and develop a local GND vision for our County. As we look at bill 44-21, we wish to offer some specific amendments to ensure that this bill embodies GND principles.

First, we propose that a portion of the funding be set aside specifically for low and moderate income communities, for renters, and for communities with a high level of energy poverty. We know that these communities are most likely to struggle to bear the costs of a transition from fossil fuels, and also that these communities suffer disproportionately from the many negative effects of fossil fuel use, such as poor indoor air quality and increased fire hazards. We also propose that a portion of this funding should be available as grants and as zero-interest loans.

Second, we propose that the charter of the Green Bank be amended to create a Climate Justice Board that would review and approve all projects using money set aside for low and moderate income communities under bill 44-21. It is not enough to appropriate money for these communities but then leave them without meaningful control of these funds. Banking and finance systems have frequently failed to adequately and fairly serve some communities. A Board of members selected from low income, BIPOC and environmental justice communities in the County would bring community knowledge, expertise, and planning to project approvals and ensure that there is real ownership and support for community building retrofit projects. The Board members should be offered a stipend for their time and effort.

Finally, we support amendments to ensure that the bill includes requirements for project labor agreements and wage standards to build high quality job opportunities for our residents, and that to the extent possible by law that these jobs are made available to low and moderate communities in the County.

We support bill 44-21 as an important step towards developing a reliable funding stream for climate action in the County, but ask the Council to amend the bill to ensure that it aligns with climate justice and Green New Deal principles. Thank you for your time.

Jeffrey Weisner