

TESTIMONY BY COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARC ELRICH

on Bill 13-22, Comprehensive Building Decarbonization

July 26, 2022

My name is Adriana Hochberg, Climate Change Officer and Acting Director of the Department of Environmental Protection, speaking on behalf of the County Executive. Thank you to Council President Albornoz for the opportunity to testify on Bill 13-22 and thank you to Councilmember Reimer for partnering with the County Executive on this important piece of legislation. The Comprehensive Building Decarbonization bill requires the County Executive to issue all-electric building standards for new construction, major renovations, and additions by January 1, 2024.

I strongly support passing Bill 13-22. We are in a climate emergency and have pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. This reduction is in response to the warnings from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that states without swift actions to reduce emissions, we will face calamity to our climate, economy, and our way of life.

The actions recommended by the Panel require coordinated efforts at all levels of government and society. For us, that means we will not meet this crisis unless we phase out combustion of fossil fuels.

19% of the County's total emissions comes from natural gas use directly in our buildings. Bill 13-22 pursues the pathway to reduce those emissions, continuing the mitigation from the building sector by the ambitious Building Energy Performance Standards passed in April 2022 and accompanied tools to reduce emissions from existing buildings.

The transition to all electric buildings in new construction is already underway in the County, because of the efficiency and safety all-electric equipment offers. This means instead of using systems that rely on the combustion of fossil fuels - equipment like natural gas furnaces and boilers to heat our spaces and water, Bill 13-22 requires fully electric systems that take advantage of market-available technologies that are cleaner, more efficient, and cost-effective.

This is electric equipment like high-efficiency heat pumps, which are 2 to 3 times more efficient at transferring heat energy than natural gas furnaces.

This is induction stoves for our homes that cook food faster and reduce the pollutants and particulate matter we breathe in.

It is important to note, we are not alone in taking this step. Bill 13-22 is consistent with the latest recommendation of Governor Hogan's Commission on Climate Change to electrify new construction by 2024, as well as mirroring legislation passed by peers like New York City, San Jose, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Like these other jurisdictions, we recognize there are isolated situations where 100% electric isn't yet ready due to technology, conflicting requirements such as life safety, or simply needs an extended timeline for the switch. Systems related to emergency back-up power, life science uses, manufacturing, and commercial kitchens are some of those areas Bill 13-22 exempts. And schools and affordable housing are exempt if the building permit is submitted prior to January 1, 2026.

Bill 13-22 pushes us forward with technologies that are available on the market today. It is a crucial step for the County to achieve its zero-greenhouse gas emissions goal and ensure new construction is built with safer, human-focused, and cost-efficient equipment.