

TESTIMONY OF THE GREATER CAPITAL AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® BEFORE THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

In Opposition to Bill 13-22, Buildings - Comprehensive Building Decarbonization
July 26, 2022

Good afternoon, Council President Alborno and members of Council. My name is Avi Adler and I serve as the 2022 President-Elect of the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS® (GCAAR) – the voice of Montgomery County’s more than 12,000 REALTORS®, property managers, title attorneys, and other real estate professionals, as well as thousands of area consumers and residents. I would like to share our association’s opposition to Bill 13-22, Buildings - Comprehensive Building Decarbonization.

The aim of this legislation, according to the sponsor, is to accelerate the decarbonization of our County by moving towards 100% electric-powered systems. What the sponsors fail to mention is that moving towards “100% electric-powered systems” will not decarbonize Montgomery County. According to MyGreenMontgomery, over 60% of the energy from our county’s electricity providers comes from coal-fired power plants and other fossil fuel sources. Less than 10% comes from renewable sources such as wind and solar. How can we call that “comprehensive decarbonization”?

Making Montgomery County more affordable has been a focus in county policy making for many years, especially with an eye towards aging in place. But make no mistake, this bill will hit our current homeowners in their wallets. Cutting new construction off from natural gas usage will cause the cost of that utility to increase dramatically over time. As the user pool decreases those with gas in their homes will be squeezed into a costly decision – pay more annually to continue with their natural gas or pay more upfront to retrofit their current home and replace their appliances.

With higher costs than neighboring jurisdictions, Montgomery County has already seen an exodus of residents causing a budget shortfall on the level of hundreds of millions of dollars. Instead of incentivizing residents to make the changes through further support for our brand-new Green Bank programs or enhanced green buildings property tax credits, this bill seeks to strip residents of their choice as consumers. Alienating prospective residents and chasing away current residents seeking to scale up is the wrong way to take Montgomery County forward.

Advocates, including stakeholders from across multiple industries, spent years working on the County’s new Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) and the improved commercial property-assessed clean energy (CPACE) programs. The ink is barely dry on those efforts and, before seeing what progress is yielded from that work, this bill seeks to move the goal posts further.

Just this year, the State Legislature moved sweeping climate legislation through the Climate Solutions Now Act. It has 100 plus pages of initiatives, including a 15-month study of the feasibility of transitioning to an all-electric building code, most notably the condition of our power grid as we look at such changes. Moving forward only to find an ill-equipped grid would be dangerous for our residents.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of our Association’s perspective and look forward to our continued work on these important issues.