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Written Testimony for Introduction of Bill 13-22, Comprehensive Building Decarbonization

Submitted by:

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Dear Montgomery County Council,

For 125 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. Our Conservation priorities are human health & access to nature; biodiversity & habitat; fighting the climate crisis; and sustainable land use. The urgency of the climate crisis and its impacts right now and continuing in the future on people and wildlife, and the challenges of legislation at the federal level, underscore the importance of passing ambitious local bills like this one throughout our region. We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide testimony. ANS strongly supports the introduction of Bill 13-32, **Comprehensive Building Decarbonization, with some recommendations**, as this bill moves the county closer to meeting its climate goals of reducing 80% of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2027 and 100% by 2025.

This bill will establish two specific policies:

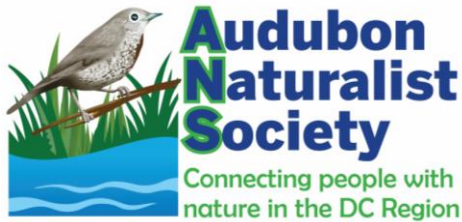
- Require all electric building standards by January 1, 2024, for new constructions, major renovations, and additions. This will also coincide with the county's next building code adoption.
- The bill also provides exceptions including income restricted housing and schools which have an extended deadline of January 1, 2026,

Bill 13-32 will ensure net zero and energy efficiency to begin on January 1, 2024. Newly built net zero buildings that incorporate energy efficient strategies into design, construction, and operation of buildings will positively impact our climate goals as net zero buildings produce a surplus of energy which contributes significantly less to greenhouse gases than traditional buildings. The efficiency requirements proposed by the bill will drastically reduce the county's need for electricity, which will have downstream long-term, positive impacts on many sectors of the economy and on energy affordability for residents on every part of the income spectrum.

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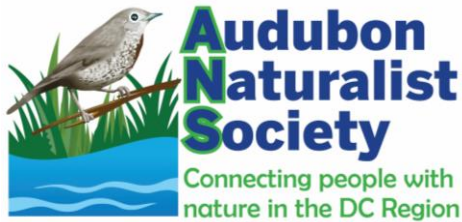
All Electric Construction is Cost Effective:

The good news is that all-electric new buildings typically have the lowest construction and operating costs. (See Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) [Building Energy Transition Plan](#)). The MCCC found that all electric construction is typically cheaper or the same cost as conventional construction:

- For single-family homes, all-electric homes *cost less to construct than new mixed-fuel homes*.
- For multifamily buildings, all-electric buildings cost about the same to construct as mixed-fuel buildings.
- For commercial buildings, all-electric buildings can have higher or lower construction costs than mixed-fuel buildings depending on building type and use.
- All-electric new buildings of all types – residential and commercial – have the lowest total annual costs (including equipment, maintenance, and energy costs) in every net-zero emissions scenario modeled.
- With respect to schools, the three net zero schools that have already been constructed in Maryland were built at the same cost as conventionally constructed schools and have drastically lower operating costs.

In addition to infrastructure benefits, the Bill 13-32 will provide a great opportunity to require and improve energy affordability for residents with low-to-moderate incomes, who are often the most vulnerable to climate change. Bill 13-22 specifies that income restricted housing and schools will have an extended timeline to become all electric if the permit application was submitted before January 1, 2026. Even though the delay would help income restricted applicants, the bill should go further and incorporate components similar to those already created by the DC Climate Commitment Act of 2021 (B24-267) and Clean Energy DC Building Code Amendment Act of 2021 (B24-420).¹ We owe it to our neighbors to make everyday necessities such as heat and light accessible. Low-income Marylanders pay a disproportionately higher amount for utilities as a percent of income than non-low-income residents. The MCCC GGRA Plan has a goal of retrofitting 100 % of low-income households by 2030. In addition, the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 included additional funding for low-income energy efficiency and retrofits. Delaying the

¹ ANS Climate Commitment and Building Code Written Testimony. Jamoni Overby. January 2022. Available at: <https://conservationblog.anshome.org/blog/take-action-make-sure-dc-keeps-its-climate-commitments/>



electrification requirements for low-income housing is detrimental to residents, works against achieving the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals, and misses an opportunity for state and federal funding.

This Bill should be strengthened by:

- Requiring that all Montgomery County government buildings, including schools, should be net zero immediately. The government should lead by example and require that all newly constructed government buildings be net zero. Allowing our youth to spend their days in net zero buildings would not only stand as an example of your commitment to our youth to reduce emissions but would spur them on to take bolder actions in their future.
- Require that 100% of new government vehicle purchases have zero carbon tailpipe emissions from 2024 onward.
- Require that all replacements of water and space heating equipment in government buildings, including school buildings, must have zero carbon on-site emissions from 2024 onward. By requiring that any new school buildings are net zero and energy efficient, you are providing real life examples to students who will be the guardians of our planet in the future.

Our climate commitments and energy efficiency are a step towards a more equitable society, and we hope that the Council agrees. On behalf of our 28,000 members and supporters, we strongly urge the Council to vote to pass **Bill 13-22, Comprehensive Building Decarbonization, with some recommendations.**

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra, MD Conservation Advocate at ANS

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