



WE ARE CASA
SOMOS CASA



Serena McIlwain
Maryland Department of the Environment
Montgomery Park Business Center
1800 Washington Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21230

Re: Maryland's Climate Pathway Report

October 16, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in response to the *Maryland's Climate Pathway Report*. We are environmental, faith, and community groups working in partnership to ensure that Maryland achieves its goal of a 60% emissions reduction by 2031, with a particular focus on reducing emissions from our homes and buildings.

As you know, Maryland can harness untapped renewable energy to reach 100% clean, efficient and affordable electricity. The Climate Solutions Now Act directs the state to reduce global-warming emissions by beginning to shift away from the use of fossil fuels to power our homes and towards cleaner, more efficient electric heating and appliances.

Burning fossil fuels in our homes — such as in gas stoves or furnaces — produces greenhouse gasses and toxic air pollution. [Research](#) has found that living in a home with a gas stove increases a child's risk of concurrent and lifetime asthma by approximately 32%.

As you finalize the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan, we urge you to consider a few key policies and principles to reduce emissions from buildings:

Leveraging EmPOWER Maryland to improve efficiency and promote clean energy.

In order to meet our goals, we must conserve more energy, use energy more wisely and efficiently, and rely on sources of energy that are clean, renewable and less environmentally damaging. Doing so will create big savings for our climate, our health and our wallets.

EmPOWER Maryland, the state's energy efficiency program, is a key tool in this effort. Since 2008, the program has [saved ratepayers](#) more than \$4 billion on energy bills and [reduced Maryland's greenhouse gas emissions](#) by the equivalent of 9.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. That's equal to taking 2 million cars off the road for a year. Through incentives and rebates for home energy audits, weatherization, and efficient appliances EmPOWER reduces energy consumption, lowering utility bills while minimizing peak demand.

To date, however, the program has not adequately worked to reduce harmful climate emissions and has not delivered for low-income Marylanders. It's critical that the legislature make adjustments to EmPOWER in 2024 to set clear greenhouse gas reduction goals, enable incentives for switching to electric heating and appliances, and enact consumer guardrails that direct utilities to deliver savings to ratepayers through in-home improvements.

It's equally important the Department of Housing and Community Development reach and exceed its goals for low-income energy efficiency and the state ramp-up investment in energy efficiency and electrification for low-income households through a whole-home retrofit program.

Developing a comprehensive plan for transitioning our buildings and utilities.

We need a comprehensive plan driving the transition of buildings and housing stock to clean, efficient electricity, in order to ensure utilities are taking concrete, timely steps to phase out fossil fuels. A strong plan won't leave anyone behind in our clean energy future and will emphasize:

- Cross-agency collaboration to set state-wide electrification goals for this next decade, including a sub goal for low and moderate-income housing;
- A holistic approach that addresses health and safety upgrades, electrical upgrades, and efficiency upgrades, particularly for low and moderate-income housing;
- Development and funding for a whole-home retrofit program, and more community outreach specialists to guide homeowners through the retrofit process;
- Workforce development to recruit and train workers and contractors to meet demand;

- Housing and energy efficiency funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed toward low and moderate income households;
- The full scope of regulatory tools available to Maryland agencies to meet goals, including accelerating the adoption of efficient electric appliances;
- Comprehensive gas and electric utility planning aligned with Maryland's climate needs.

Transitioning our utilities away from gas requires a delicate balance of maintaining the safety and affordability of gas as we phase it out, and the reliability and affordability of electricity as we scale it up. It is of particular importance that low income households are not left paying for expensive gas infrastructure maintenance as the state transitions toward a highly-electrified building sector.

This shift requires creativity and innovation such as exploring low-carbon heat networks like networked geothermal. We are counting on your leadership to guide the utilities and Public Service Commission to properly plan for and execute this transition in a way that protects consumers and the planet.

We look forward to working with you to meet these critical goals.

Sincerely,

Jose Coronado-Flores, CASA

Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Bethesda

Anne Havemann, Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Donald Goldberg, Climate Law & Policy Project.

Elders Climate Action Maryland

Johanna Neumann, Environment Maryland

Howard County Climate Action

Maryland League of Conservation Voters

Maryland Legislative Conference - Climate Justice Wing

Emily Scarr, Maryland PIRG Foundation

The Climate Mobilization Montgomery County Chapter

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland