



House Bill 1532

Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: March 25, 2026

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1532 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. Among other things, this bill mandates that counties adopt certain software for the review and approval of rooftop solar permit applications and directs the Power Plant Research Program to produce a study on streamlining energy zoning and permitting.

The 2025 and 2026 sessions will go down in history as the “Sessions of Energy,” with an unprecedented number of bills debated and enacted to address reliability and utility costs. Last year, one of the most consequential actions was the Renewable Energy Certainty Act (RECA), which sought to provide clearer guardrails for project siting, and to affirm local roles in that process. HB 1532 follows, in a long line of high-profile legislation aimed at energy affordability and system planning. Counties have three core interests with HB 1532:

Mandated Software Causes Safety & Preservation Concerns

Page 14, Line 18 – Page 18, line 22 mandates that local governments adopt permitting software for automatic approvals of rooftop solar applications, and if county inspections timelines exceed 5 days by 2028, mandates that a county implement a remote inspection option. Counties echo the concerns raised by the Maryland Municipal League and flag three especially serious issues:

1. **Disregards Firefighter & Resident Safety** – The bill requires counties to allow remote inspections of installed solar panels if average inspection times exceed five business days over a 12-month period. Remote inspections frequently do not provide a sufficient review for code compliance, adequate firefighter access or other safety criteria. This could create a risk where important health and safety requirements go overlooked.
2. **Overlooks Historic Preservation** – The bill specifically excludes historic preservation under what must be reviewed by the solar permitting software. By excluding historic preservation criteria or designations, HB 1532 preempts counties from reviewing or denying a permit based

on an application's failure to comply with federal, state, or local historic preservation requirements or other related criteria. Effectively, this would leave counties unable to deny or propose additional requirements on properties under easements or other forms of protection.

3. **Burdensome Reporting Mandate** – The bill requires local governments to submit quarterly reports on average inspection times for residential rooftop solar installations. County planning and permitting offices are already being asked to do more with fewer resources. This additional reporting mandate would add to the administrative burden and could further slow permitting by deepening the bureaucratic workload those offices are already struggling to manage.

Counties are eager to be productive stakeholders in addressing Maryland's current energy crisis and offer the following amendment which would reach the same intent of this section without unintended consequences:

Strike page 14, line 18, through page 18, line 22, inclusive, and insert:

(A) BY AUGUST 1, 2027, EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHALL ESTABLISH AN EXPEDITED PERMIT REVIEW PROCESS FOR:

- (1) RESIDENTIAL SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS;**
- (2) RESIDENTIAL ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS;**
- (3) MAIN ELECTRICAL PANEL UPGRADES; AND**
- (4) MAIN ELECTRICAL PANEL DERATES.**

(B) THE EXPEDITED REVIEW PROCESS REQUIRED UNDER SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION SHALL BE DESIGNED TO:

- (1) PROVIDE PERMIT APPLICATION REVIEWS AND DETERMINATIONS WITHIN AN AVERAGE OF 7 DAYS AFTER SUBMISSION OF A COMPLETE APPLICATION; AND**
- (2) PROVIDE INSPECTIONS OF A COMPLETED PROJECT WITHIN AN AVERAGE OF 7 DAYS AFTER SUBMISSION OF A COMPLETE APPLICATION FOR INSPECTION.**

(C) A COUNTY OR MUNICIPALITY MAY NOT BE REQUIRED TO COMPLY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF SUBSECTIONS (A) AND (B) OF THIS SECTION IF THE COUNTY OR MUNICIPALITY DOES NOT REQUIRE A PERMIT FOR:

- (1) RESIDENTIAL SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS; OR**
- (2) RESIDENTIAL SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS PAIRED WITH A RESIDENTIAL SOLAR ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM;**

Clarity Needed Around Solar Siting

Last session, the General Assembly passed the historic Renewable Energy Certainty Act, which clarified several open questions around solar energy siting statewide. While that legislation moved in a positive direction, several points still require clarification to avoid slowing Maryland's solar deployment. Three changes in particular are needed:

1. **Strike salvage value from the calculation of the decommissioning bond.** No facility has yet to be decommissioned, and the more than 30-year time horizon for the lifespan of these facilities means an accurate calculation near impossible. Without this change, both the State and county governments may be facing serious costs related to decommissioning if there was a scenario where a bond will need to be called, and the total is insufficient.
2. **Clarify that the 5% limit within a priority preservation area includes facilities constructed both before and after the effective date of the legislation.** There have been some questions about interpretation and intent. This addition just clarifies that all facilities should be included in that calculation, regardless of the construction date.
3. **Adjust the Priority Preservation Area establishment date to January 1, 2026.** Somerset County was in the process of still establishing a PPA when this legislation was enacted. This change ensures that Somerset can still enjoy the incentives under this legislation to further solar development. Between enactment and January 1, 2026, no other county has established or adjusted their PPA.

Insert into appropriate segment of the bill, this new language:

"Article - Public Utilities

7-218.

(g) An owner of a solar energy generating station:

(2) shall post a surety bond with the Commission for not more than 125% of the estimated future cost of decommissioning the solar energy generating station and its related infrastructure, [less any salvage value]; and

(h) (4) (i) The total combined number of solar energy generating stations **HAVE BEEN AND** that may be approved for construction in a priority preservation area that was established before January 1, [2025] 2026, shall:

1. be limited in area to 5% of the total acreage of the priority preservation area;
2. be located in the project area within the priority preservation area; and
3. meet all requirements under this section."

Local Input on Zoning Considerations

For over a decade, Maryland courts and the General Assembly have made clear that counties are largely preempted on many energy-related matters, particularly utility-scale generation siting. However, that preemption is not absolute, and counties remain the primary level of government responsible for land use and zoning at the community level. MACo requests an amendment to clarify that recommendations on a state-level zoning or permitting structure be developed in consultation with county planning and permitting officials, so the recommendations reflect local comprehensive plans, county infrastructure capacity, and community impacts.

Counties urge the following amendment language:

On page 93, in line 29 after “timelines;” insert “(3) coordinate with appropriate local governments in the development of the sites and processes through this Act, to ensure appropriate community input and coordination; and”; and in line 30 strike “(3) and substitute “(4)”.

Counties remain committed to being productive stakeholders in addressing Maryland’s energy needs and look forward to deepening their partnership with the State to meet this moment. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 1532.