

Committee: *House Appropriations Committee*

Testimony For: *(HB 1295) Public School Construction – School District Energy Use – Policy and Study*

Position: *Support with Amendments*

Hearing Date: *March 10, 2020*

Joseph Jakuta (Sierra Club’s Climate Parents in Prince George’s County)

Overview:

There is a play on an old saw, the best time to start collecting data is twenty years ago, the second best time is now. Unfortunately, most Maryland school systems did not start twenty years and need to do start now when it comes to energy use. If we are looking back twenty years from now and our schools systems did not have energy data collection and robust energy policies in place they will have spent twenty years wasting energy unnecessarily and spending taxpayer funds in a fashion that didn’t go to benefit student education. While this legislation will not completely solve these issues, it is an important step and should be enacted (with amendment).

Requested Amendment:

It is important to amend the bill to require reporting and consideration of onsite fossil fuel consumption, not just electricity use. Energy use and electricity use are not 100% equivalent. In particular, many indoor air heating systems, water heating equipment, and food preparation equipment rely on natural gas, or oil in the case of heating. Also, schools often have diesel or natural gas powered generators for back-up power. Use of this equipment results in the consumption of energy and needs to be part of a holistic building energy plan.

Our electrical grid is rapidly cleaning itself up thanks to the Clean Energy Jobs Act that the Maryland General Assembly passed in 2018, but this onsite fossil fuel burning equipment will continue to produce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution regardless of improvements in the grid. Any comprehensive energy plan must deal with this equipment and this legislation must require reporting of onsite fossil fuel consumption, by fuel type (e.g., natural gas, oil, diesel), in addition to electricity use.

Prohibiting, beginning July 1, 2021, the Interagency Commission on School Construction from approving a public school construction project for a school district that has not adopted or updated a certain school district energy policy:

Many school systems in Maryland do not a full-fledged energy plan and several do not even have an explicit energy reduction policy in place. Research conducted by the MCPS Clean Energy Campaign found only three systems have energy plans in place. They also found that five counties did not even have an energy policy place. The vast majority of counties were in the middle where they had an energy policy, but not a specific energy plan. Given the savings to school systems and taxpayers that would come from implementable energy plan, one would expect every school system in Maryland to already have one. Since that is not the case, it is clear that a stick such as this is needed to make this happen across the board.

Specifying the contents of a school district energy policy:

Data collection on energy consumption by schools is vital. Schools systems themselves stand to benefit a lot directly from this data collection. For instance, if a school system finds that a particular school is far more inefficient in terms of energy consumption than others, priority can be given to rebuilding or retrofitting that particular building over others so as to save the school system and taxpayers money.

Additionally, companies called Energy Service Companies (ESCOs) are becoming more sophisticated and have now developed advanced energy data collection sensor systems that can collect this data and then analyze it to prioritize energy saving measures. This partnership can even lead to smart financing opportunities for school systems that need upfront monies for energy improvements. One particular school system, Hillsborough County, Florida (the 8th largest system in the nation) now saves over one million dollars annually from partnering with an ESCO to reduce energy consumption.

Encouraging school districts to set certain targets in their school district energy policy: etc.

School systems are one of the largest energy consumers in the public sector. Prince George's County alone has 208 educational facilities that are all consuming energy. The state of Maryland cannot meet its renewable energy and greenhouse gas emissions goals without tackling energy consumption in schools. In order to accomplish this, school systems must set specific goals to meet. Also, if goals are not in place there is no way for school administrators, buildings personnel, legislators, regulators, or the public at large to know if they are on track.

Requiring that a school district energy policy be posted on the school district's website and updated every 2 years:

Requiring energy policies to be public is also important. Energy use costs taxpayers money, money that could go towards educational activities such as those supported in the Blueprint for Maryland. If taxpayers and voters cannot understand how schools use energy and what the plans are to reduce energy consumption they cannot advocate to decisions makers, such as your selves, with the best and most correct insights.

Summary:

I urge you to support House Bill 1295 with amendment. We need to start understanding how our schools consume energy and to start planning how to reduce that energy consumption to reduce the burden on the school systems finances and the taxpayer and in turn to reduce our schools' impact on the climate and air pollution.

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My Background:

My name is Joseph Jakuta and I live in Mount Rainier, Maryland in District 47A. I am also the father of a five year old that is enrolled in Prince George's County Public Schools and a two year old that will be in a few years. I am also the lead volunteer on Sierra Club's Climate Parents campaign for 100% Clean Energy schools in Prince George's County Maryland.

I also have additional background and expertise in regards to this legislation. I have a Master's in Environmental Management for the Nicholas School of the Environment where I studied energy and air quality policy. I then spent the next eight years working for a regional air quality organization, the Ozone Transport Commissioner, of which the state of Maryland is a member. During that time I also was appointed to the City of Mount Rainier's Environmental Protection Board, where I assisted with recommendations on energy issues in municipal buildings. I now work for the District of Columbia on issues of air quality and energy. One particular area of expertise I bring with me involves the use of energy data to evaluate emissions from institutional buildings. I also volunteer for the advocacy committee for my son's school's Parent Teacher Student Association. All of this expertise is being brought forward to my volunteer activities with the Climate Parent's campaign for 100% Clean Energy schools.