



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

February 7, 2021

Re: **Functional 98% Ban of Affordable Solar Energy in Montgomery County**

To the President and Members of the Montgomery County Council:

Living in Montgomery County all my life, I recognize the extraordinary work our County Council is capable of doing including your efforts now during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the Montgomery County Council is recognized for its tremendous past contributions in dealing with an equally dangerous threat to our livelihoods and health: global warming.

I write now because, as a state legislative leader on environmental issues, **I am deeply disturbed by the Council's recent actions impacting the development of solar energy.** Specifically, the Council's decision to restrict solar building on *Class 2* soil in the Agricultural Reserve and to impose *Conditional Use* review to the solar *Zoning Text Amendment* have made the development of community solar essentially impossible.

Look to the immediate and predictably negative response of solar developers to this action – including *businesses in our own county* – which make clear that those restrictive conditions effectively shut down any possibility of building solar projects on open land in the Agricultural Reserve.

To fully understand the economic impact of your potential action, realize that energy generated from solar panels placed in open fields (terrestrial) are the only truly affordable source of renewable energy. In fact, a recent analysis by the firm Lazard Ltd. shows that based on price, only terrestrial-based solar panels beats the cost of fossil fuel generation. Rooftop solar can be 2 ½ to 5 times more expensive than terrestrial solar.

The other negative impact of this proposed amendment would be to significantly reduce capacity for small-scale solar projects under the Legislature's *Community Solar* program. These are the projects that give low- and middle-class families affordable access to clean energy.

Further, from my statewide perspective, I am seriously concerned that should the currently amended zoning bill pass, the precedent set by our County in taking such a regressive step will have negative repercussions on clean-energy development/equity in the future, across Maryland and the region. Indeed, **if a local government of Montgomery County's stature and progressive reputation can turn its back on affordable community solar, other Maryland counties might likely follow suit.**

I respectfully ask the Council to withdraw what has become a potentially harmful bill. Instead, I ask you to compromise by leveraging our progressive knowledge base and practical experience. In this way, the County can create a synergistic solution that advances clean energy, protects agriculture, creates jobs and improves our overall wellbeing. In short, the Council can provide the type of creative solution that we have come to expect from Maryland's leading jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kumar Barve', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Kumar Barve