MLC Climate Justice Wing - 2026 Priority Legislative Issues

The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing is a statewide coalition of 30 grassroots and professional organizations focused on climate justice policy in Maryland. We have identified five key issues that are critical to meeting the Climate Solutions Now Act goals of 60% greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction by 2031 and net zero by 2045 and protect utility ratepayers.

1. Transition Buildings to Efficient Electric and Stop Expansion of Gas Infrastructure
2. Upgrade Electric Transmission and Distribution Systems
3. Put Common-Sense Guardrails Around Data Center Development
4. Adequately Fund Climate Solutions Now Act Implementation
5. Transportation emission reductions, specifically focused on the reintroduction of the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act.

Transition Buildings to Efficient Electric and Stop Expansion of Gas Infrastructure

Buildings are significant greenhouse gas emitters, and 16% of Maryland's emissions come directly from burning fossil fuels, mostly methane, in buildings. To date, about 50% of Maryland buildings are electric. A recent ruling by the Public Service Commission to end subsidies for new gas hook-ups will likely increase this number. Our goal is to transition many of the remaining buildings from onsite combustion to more efficient electric appliances. This will provide cost savings to many, improve public health, and reduce climate change stresses. The Maryland legislature can aid this transition through the use oversight hearings and other methods to ensure that prior legislative wins, such as the Maryland Building Energy Performance Standard, Empower Reform and the Rate Payer Protection Act, are fully implemented and that Governor Moore's Executive Order in support of the Zero Emission Heating Equipment Standard is not legislatively thwarted. Additional innovative legislative policies that lower energy demand and costs, such as the WARMTH Act, which utilizes geothermal technologies to reduce grid demand and will create jobs for pipefitters and other trades in the gas industry, should also be implemented and built upon.

Finally, the legislature must work with the Public Service Commission to protect Maryland residents from rising utility rates associated with utility infrastructure spending and the growth of data centers. As we experience more extreme weather events because of climate change, the legislature must continue to put in place and safeguard energy-efficient building policies to lower consumer costs, lower pollution, and keep Maryland businesses and communities healthy and safe.

Upgrade Electric Transmission and Distribution Systems

To achieve the Climate Solutions Now Act GHG reduction goals, Maryland must electrify buildings, vehicles, and the transportation system; add renewable generation; and upgrade electric transmission and distribution systems to ensure capacity and reliability. However, we must address several challenges, including pushing our grid operator, PJM, to interconnect more renewable energy; improving and building new efficient electric transmission; and managing data center development without impeding building and transportation electrification or breaking the grid.

While we need more transmission capacity, ratepayers must be protected by ensuring large energy users don't shift substantial costs to residential and commercial customers. Solutions include: 1) requiring or incentivizing cost-effective grid-enhancing technologies and advanced conductors on the distribution and transmission systems; 2) using HVDC transmission wherever appropriate, e.g., transmission for offshore wind; 4) managing in-state data center growth and requiring renewable generation, battery storage, and sharing new transmission costs; and 5) pushing PJM to accelerate interconnection for new solar, wind, and storage.

Put Common-Sense Guardrails Around Data Center Development

Data centers will have significant electric grid, financial, environmental, and quality of life impacts on Maryland. While we do not oppose data centers in Maryland, data center development should be done in the best possible way. We must learn from the mistakes of Virginia and other states and enact common sense guardrails. Our primary concerns are: 1) energy demand (e.g., one hyper-scale data center can use as much electricity as more than half the households in Maryland); 2) increasing electric rates for consumers while data centers get a tax break (i.e., data centers require new transmission, substations, and more power generation); 3) air pollution and noise from back-up diesel generators; 4) water use (hyper-scale data centers may use a million gallons per day); and 5) data center approvals, tracking and management at the local level. Local governments don't have the tools or staff to evaluate data center proposals, especially at hyper-scale sites where there may be multiple permits by multiple operators. As a result, there is no cumulative effects monitoring or management. Also, MDE does not have authority for cumulative impact analysis with respect to air quality permits, e.g., for backup diesel generators installed to support multiple data center developments on the same campus.

Solutions include: 1) requiring a state comprehensive study on the effects of data centers and a moratorium on data center tax breaks until the study is completed and a plan of action approved - override the Governor's veto on HB270/SB116; 2) making the tax incentive dependent on using clean energy and best available technology for back-up power and battery storage; 3) requiring new transmission costs be borne by data center developers and not ratepayers; 4) requiring a Public Service Commission approval process for new data centers that considers new transmission/distribution lines and the impact on electricity rates; 5) requiring mandatory disclosure and public availability of new data center locations, size, number of diesel generators, electricity and water usage with state tracking and reporting; 6) requiring a MDE(Comprehensive Water Study process) approval process for new data centers that considers water usage and the impact on water resources, quality and the effect on the state's restoration goals for the Chesapeake Bay.

Adequately Fund Climate Solutions Now Act Implementation

Funding is necessary for the successful implementation of the Climate Solutions Now Act. Governor Moore and the General Assembly must support a funding mechanism, and there are several to choose from: 1) RENEW Act, 2) Climate Pollution Reduction Fund Act, 3) Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act, and 4) Cap and Invest bill similar to other states. The legislature must pass one or more of these bills.

Transportation and Climate

We are working closely with the Transform Maryland Transportation Coalition to refine and support the reintroduction of the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act.