

# New campaign seeks to require half of Maryland energy to come from renewable sources

**By Scott Dance - Contact Reporter**

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A coalition of environmentalists, clergy and solar and wind energy companies launched a campaign Wednesday calling for half of Maryland's electricity to come from renewable sources.

That would double a policy adopted last year requiring that renewable energy account for 25 percent of the state's electricity portfolio by 2020. The new campaign is setting a target of 2030.

"We cannot wait another moment to begin bringing about the clean-energy future we need," said Brooke Harper, Maryland and District of Columbia policy director for the **Chesapeake Climate Action Network**.

The campaign is casting the state's renewable energy mandate as a tool to create "green" jobs, particularly in economically depressed communities and among women and people of color. Among the groups endorsing what has been dubbed the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Initiative are branches of the NAACP from across the state, Interfaith Power and Light, SEIU 1199 and the Maryland-Virginia Solar Energy Industries Association.

They are also stressing it as a way to promote environmental justice.

"For too long here in Maryland's communities of color, our children and our elders have paid for dirty energy with their health," said Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton, leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.

The policy does not require utilities to buy renewable power, but it mandates that they buy certificates that each represent a megawatt of renewable power. Utilities like Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. and retail electricity sellers are required to buy

enough of the credits to equal a set and growing percentage of their power supply — 15.6 percent in 2017 — or pay a penalty.

The certificates cost Maryland electricity ratepayers \$126.7 million in 2015, according to the state Public Service Commission.

The 25 percent goal became law last year when when the Democratic-controlled **General Assembly voted to override a veto by Republican Gov. Larry Hogan**. The legislature had passed it the year before, but the governor rejected it, deriding the measure as a “sunshine tax.”

That suggests another difficult political fight ahead in Annapolis.

Karla Raettig, executive director of the Maryland League of Conservation Voters, said the coalition is prepared for that.

“We have a lot of momentum,” she said. That is especially true coming off a stretch of natural disasters “where you see the impacts of climate change,” she said.

Amelia Chasse, a spokeswoman for Hogan, did not respond to questions about the governor’s position on the proposal. She said he “strongly supports efforts to combat climate change,” including statewide greenhouse gas reduction goals, Maryland’s participation in a regional cap-and-trade system for Northeast power plants’ carbon emissions, and incentives for use of electric vehicles.

No lawmakers attended an event marking the launch of the campaign Wednesday in Charles Village. Del. Bill Frick, a Democrat from Montgomery County, plans to sponsor the bill in the House; Harper said the campaign is still working to line up a sponsor in the state Senate.

Del. Shane Robinson, another Montgomery Democrat, said he meanwhile plans to push a bill that would move the state to getting 100 percent of its power from solar, wind and geothermal generation.

Those sources combined for just 27 percent of the state’s renewable energy supply in 2015. The bulk of ratepayer subsidies go to trash incinerators, hydroelectric dams and paper mills, which burn a byproduct known as black liquor.

He called the 50 percent renewable energy goal “laudable,” but said Maryland is too small for its policy to make a meaningful impact on global climate change — unless it adopts a policy so aggressive it prompts other states to follow suit.

“If we can get other states and then other countries to act more quickly because of actions we take here, that’s how Maryland has an impact on climate change,” he said.

Harper said while the campaign’s bill and Robinson’s bill may appear to be competing, “we all have the same goal of getting Maryland to 100 percent clean, renewable energy.” She called the 50 percent goal “a critical benchmark and step” to getting there.

The Maryland House of Delegates voted to override Governor Hogan's veto of the Clean Energy Jobs Act of 2016. The vote was 88-51. (Amy Davis, Baltimore Sun video)

**[ssdance@baltsun.com](mailto:ssdance@baltsun.com)**

**[twitter.com/ssdance](https://twitter.com/ssdance)**

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