RE: B23-0193, the Electric Vehicle Readiness Amendment Act of 2019
Joint Hearing by the Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, December 9th, 2019

Dear members of the Council of the Whole and the Committee on Transportation and the Environment,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am the District of Columbia Conservation Advocate for the Audubon Naturalist Society, which has been helping residents of the DMV enjoy, learn about, and protect nature for over 120 years. On behalf of our 10,000 members and supporters, I am here to speak in support of B23-0193, the Electric Vehicle Readiness Amendment Act of 2019. The successful implementation of existing clean energy statutes depends on the city’s ability to support transportation electrification. This bill is an important step towards achieving a 50% reduction in 2006 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2032, a carbon neutral city by 2050, and towards satisfying the Clean Energy DC Act.

Title V of the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2018 states that the Department of Energy and Environment and the Department of Motor Vehicles shall issue a revenue neutral vehicle excise tax on the purchase of vehicles below a benchmark efficiency standard. This tax is currently in development and is aimed at incentivizing the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles. Electric vehicles will be exempt from the tax, potentially increasing their purchase. The presence of charging stations in multi-unit residential buildings and commercial buildings will provide consumers with the assurance that an electric vehicle is a viable option for long and short distance travel alike. Requiring installation of charging stations also spurs electric vehicle producers to bring business to the District and market to the city’s residents. This can offer job opportunities throughout the city, and through careful oversight, can help ensure that residents employed in the manufacture and sale of gasoline-powered vehicles have ample opportunity to find work once the city electrifies.

This bill also has the potential to play a valuable role in reducing overall household costs for families and individuals in the District. The average cost to operate a gasoline-powered vehicle in the District of Columbia in 2017 was $1,229, while the comparative cost to operate a battery electric vehicle was $508. This results in a cost savings of $721 per vehicle, per year. On a gallon-by-gallon basis, the US Department of Energy calculates that the current average cost of gasoline in the District is $2.61, while an equivalent “eGallon,” or the amount of electricity needed to fuel a car to run the same distance as a gallon of gasoline, is only $1.16. The price of electricity is far more consistent that the price of gasoline in the District, lending predictability to this market.

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1 DC Law 22-257
Along with our staunch support for this bill, I urge the Council to consider the financial impact of constructing and maintaining charging stations for building owners and operators. For public buy-in for transportation electrification to occur, it must be financially advantageous to the customer. In order to maintain the aforementioned cost benefits of operating an electric vehicle, it is critical that the price of charging station purchase and installation not be passed down to end users. The cost of Level 2 charging stations, which are mandated by the Bill, can be many thousands of dollars per station, without significant return on investment for building owners. These costs can be particularly prohibitive to owners of affordable housing in the District. While Pepco customers in Maryland are eligible for generous rebates for buying and installing electric vehicle charging stations\(^5\), no such program yet exists in the District. Should the Council vote to pass the Act, it and the Department of Energy and Environment may want to work with the Public Service Commission to encourage authorization of a similar rebate program in DC. Such a program, coupled with additional incentives such as financing through the Green Bank, may support rapid and equitable adoption of this bill.

While electrification of the transportation sector is vital to reducing DC’s greenhouse gas emissions, it cannot exist in a vacuum. The Department of Energy and Environment’s most recent greenhouse gas inventory data indicates that in 2016, the equivalent of roughly 1.27 million metric tons of carbon dioxide were released from passenger vehicles alone in the District\(^6\). These emissions make up roughly 16.8% of the District’s total greenhouse gas emissions\(^7\), which is not insignificant. For vehicle electrification and the proposed charging infrastructure to actually impact these emissions though, they must be paired with electric grid decarbonization.

Research conducted by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory indicates that the relative carbon footprint of a city’s electric grid drastically impacts the emissions reductions achieved through vehicle electrification. On a low carbon grid, the average daily carbon dioxide emissions associated with battery electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles are 3.2 times lower than those of a gasoline-powered vehicle. On a high carbon grid, however, electric vehicle emissions are only 1.2 times lower than gasoline-powered vehicles\(^8\). A low-carbon includes abundant renewable energy, which is mandated by the District’s Renewable Portfolio Standard. Currently, the District’s fuel mix is miles (pun intended) from meeting it’s renewable energy requirements. This seriously impacts the success of the Bill in front of us today. As such, I urge the Council to push for strong implementation of the Renewable Portfolio Standard.

Thank you,

Ari Eisenstadt
DC Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society

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