

# Real Progress: Solving the Green Building Policy Puzzle

Published on **16 Mar 2011**

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Posted in [Advocacy and policy](#)



Welcome to another extremely busy season for state legislative activity. If you haven't started paying attention, the action in most states is in high gear, as most state legislatures meet in the first quarter of the year. Some states are even finishing their 2011 sessions and are already closing their doors until next time around.

In nearly every state we've seen some real positive ideas drafted into bills, introduced to legislatures, and discussed and debated on the floor—with varying success. While we may expect waning support for the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) in state legislative sessions this year compared with previous sessions—the far narrowed view of the single bottom line has captured much of the limelight—but there are certainly several successes to celebrate along the way:

- The Florida Legislature is considering a bill that would recognize green building as part of the scoring system for competitive loans offered to affordable housing developers in the state. (A similar attempt was made in Mississippi, but the bill died in committee). Green affordable housing is one of the core areas of USGBC's advocacy and we strongly support policies that lead to better affordable housing.
- Several states are considering the use of LEED as a tool for state-owned and -funded building construction – [leadership by example](#) policy that has been adopted by 26 state governments to date.
- Other states are considering bills that would prioritize permitting for building projects that commit to building green, or invest in retrofitting school buildings to be healthier and more resource- and energy-efficient.
- And despite the down economy, a few states are considering outlays for tax incentives for green homebuilding and retrofits. (See [here](#) for a healthy list of green building incentive strategies.

One particular bill in Maryland is worth highlighting, one that would make Maryland the first state to adopt the International Green Construction Code on a large scale. The revised bill is sophisticated in recognizing the distinct and complementary roles of green building codes and green building rating systems (a topic we reviewed in a recent educational [webinar](#) with AIA, ASHRAE and ICC). This approach mirrors what I wrote in a [previous post](#) and what was spelled out in USGBC's "Greening the Codes" white paper: We need *mandatory codes and standards* to improve all buildings on a massive scale, and beyond-code rating systems to continue to encourage and reward leadership in green building. Maryland continues to be a [leader in green building policy](#) at both the state and local levels.

The solution to the green building policy puzzle is in both pushes and pulls. We must continue to raise the minimum expectations we have for all buildings. In addition, as clearly stated by this [one-sentence bill](#) in California, state lawmaking bodies must "...enact legislation to encourage innovation in green building design and natural building that meets or exceeds all existing health and safety requirements."

This message is all the more compelling when you realize that this bill is being considered in a state where minimum statewide requirements are already the highest in the country, by way of the [California Green Building Standards Code](#).

The many successes we've seen this year already are a testament to the [productive partnerships](#) that are growing between green building community members and their lawmakers. USGBC and our chapters will continue to push forwards. Let's keep up the good work.

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