



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
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Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB 109 “Public Service Commission – Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity – Rapid Health Impact Assessment and Final Action”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 13, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club requests a favorable report on HB 109. This bill provides that applications to the Public Service Commission (PSC) for approval of a new electricity generating station, and certain transmission and lead lines, be accompanied by a “rapid health impact assessment” (HIA) of the project’s likely actual and potential effects on the health of the adjacent population. The PSC then would consider these effects in deciding whether to grant the application.

Currently, these PSC applicants have many reporting requirements, including reporting on environmental impacts and pollution permits (such as nitrogen oxide emission limits), and land use plans. These reports provide necessary and critical information to the PSC in deciding which projects to approve or deny. However, related information regarding potential health impacts is not explicitly required to be reported upon.

In recent years and in other contexts, the HIA mechanism has been developed to better inform decisionmakers and the public about how a particular project may impact community health. In particular, HIA reports can provide important publicly-consumable analyses of information contained within other, more technical documents.

In PSC proceedings, the environmental data which applicants provide is valuable, but often are difficult for the general public to interpret and navigate, and lack information on health impacts of concern. This, in turn, inhibits the ability of the public to exercise its right to participate in, and provide input to, PSC reviews. An HIA can help centralize, interpret, and explain what the environmental permits and data mean for day-to-day life within a community near a proposed project, and thus would empower citizens to be better informed and to express any concerns about impacts on their health and environment. As our state continues to develop, we must ensure that public health and community participation are priorities, and PSC reviews should reflect these commitments.

For these reasons, requiring accessible HIA reports should be a standard part of these PSC applications, and we urge a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.