

**Testimony on HB 298  
Utility Regulation – Consideration of Climate and Labor**

**Bill Sponsor: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian  
Committee: Economics Matters Committee  
Hearing Date: January 21, 2021**

**Position: Favorable**

As a resident in Howard County in District 13, I urge you to support legislation that requires the Public Service Commission (PSC) to consider the maintenance of fair and stable labor standards and the protection of the global climate.

I was shocked to learn that Maryland Public Service Commission, which approves all large facilities that generate electricity and oversees gas utility companies, does not consider climate in its decision-making process. The PSC is a core part of the state government and the principal regulator of electricity in Maryland.

I was beyond frustrated when I attended a PSC hearing in Baltimore in April 2019 for the permit hearing for the reopening of retired the CP Crane Power Plant as a frack-gas peaker plant. Many local residents expressed concerns of noise and air pollution as this is the most polluting type of gas plant that exists. They expressed health concerns as well as climate concerns, but their voices were ignored when the PSC approved this retired coal-fired facility in Baltimore to repower to gas. In approving the project, the PSC concluded that its governing statute “does not specifically or generally require considerations regarding climate change.”

Similarly, in testimony submitted to the Senate Finance Committee in 2020, the PSC stated that, “...the Commission is not mandated to make decisions about labor standards...”. It is important that the PSC keep labor standards and equity front and center. We need a PSC that is able to fully consider these proposals’ climate change and labor impacts.

The Maryland legislators passed the Clean Energy Jobs Act which sets specific targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and we cannot have a PSC working at cross purposes from our lawmakers. Instead, we need a PSC that:

- Consider climate change in its regulation of the electricity sector, based upon the best available scientific information recognized by the IPCC and achieving our state climate goals.
- Consider climate impacts when reviewing applications for new electricity generating facilities, and when it approves the sites for new facilities.
- Ensure that state agencies have also considered climate when providing input to the PSC regarding applications for new facilities.
- Require energy companies applying to the PSC to disclose the benefits they will give to workers on specific energy projects.

Maryland legislators, at the urging of their constituents, have committed in law to specific targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. House Bill 0298 / Senate Bill 0083 would provide a necessary solution to the PSC’s current limitations on considering climate change and labor impacts. By requiring input from agencies with expertise in long-term planning and evaluating climate change and employee benefits, it creates an effective and straightforward process to bring the PSC in line with the rest of the state’s commitments.

For these reasons, I ask you to support HB 0298 and SB 0083.

Sincerely,

Liz Feighner  
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District 13