

Testimony in Support of SB0316 with Amendments

Presented by Bryan Price

Maryland State Senate Hearing on the Abundant Affordable Clean Energy (AACE) Act

Senator Brooks and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Senate Bill 316, the Abundant Affordable Clean Energy (AACE) Act. My name is Bryan Price, and I am writing as a concerned Maryland resident who is deeply invested in ensuring that our state's transition to clean energy is both effective and equitable.

Like many Marylanders, my life has been thrown into chaos because of the prospect of the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP). I would argue, needlessly so. Had these simple, reasonable measures been implemented earlier, many of the current issues faced by our elected officials, farmers, and families would be moot. This could have been a "win-win-win" situation for Marylanders; the State of Maryland; and I would contend, even for PSEG.

SB 316 is a starting point, but for it to be fully successful in achieving its desired goals, it must contain the proposed amendments (included for your reference in this testimony.) These amendments are not optional. They are not hypothetical thought exercises. They do not address "what-if scenarios." They are common-sense measures that flow logically out of the very real flaws in the MPRP and its process and address the equally real dangers they present to our state and its populace.

Consider the following: At a local civics club meeting, I was shocked to discover that when Delegate Mangione called PSEG and inquired about how much of our existing energy infrastructure could be utilized in the transmission project, the response was that they did not know—because they never considered it. Exploring miles of existing infrastructure was never looked into until it was demanded by our community and elected officials. (and only after whistleblowers brought this matter to the attention of the public!) It was simply easier to quietly plan to seize land from property owners under eminent domain, lower property values (thus impacting not only personal finances but also state education funding), and pass construction costs onto Maryland taxpayers in the form of rate hikes, rather than doing the necessary groundwork to ensure the most cost-effective, efficient solution. Apparently, it's preferable to uproot 70 miles of Marylanders than to inconvenience a utility company and require them to demonstrate responsibility to the communities they claim to serve. This cannot be allowed to happen. Not now. Never again.

Consider also that BGE has stated to Maryland Delegates and the community that they can provide all the power needed for Maryland’s current and future energy needs, including future power centers—albeit with upgrades to their existing infrastructure.

The following amendments would clearly protect Marylanders and their property and financial interests. They would support the State of Maryland by ensuring that all construction is financially responsible and necessary. They would also support PSEG, as they would encounter less resistance from communities whose rights have been protected, with clear expectations set, responsibilities reaffirmed, and due diligence required for their own financial benefit.

1. Requiring Cost-Benefit Analysis Before Any Transmission Expansion

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 7-704.3 (b)(2)(iii) to mandate a full cost-benefit analysis comparing new transmission projects with alternatives such as energy storage, demand response, and distributed generation.

2. Mandating Undergrounding of Any New Transmission

Proposed Amendment: Add to Public Utilities Article § 7-1206:

“(E) ANY NEW TRANSMISSION LINES APPROVED UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL BE PLACED UNDERGROUND UNLESS THE APPLICANT DEMONSTRATES THAT UNDERGROUNDING IS NOT TECHNICALLY FEASIBLE OR THAT THE COST OF UNDERGROUNDING EXCEEDS ALL AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING ENERGY STORAGE OR DISTRIBUTED GENERATION.”

3. Limiting Transmission Expansion to Existing Infrastructure

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 7-704.3 (b)(2)(ii)(2) to state:

“TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, ALL TRANSMISSION UPGRADES SHALL UTILIZE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE BEFORE CONSIDERING NEW CONSTRUCTION, INCLUDING UPGRADING EXISTING TRANSMISSION LINES TO HIGHER VOLTAGE LEVELS AND USING HIGHWAYS OR RAILWAYS FOR NEW TRANSMISSION ROUTES.”

4. Preventing Ratepayer Burden for Unnecessary Transmission Expansion

Proposed Amendment: Amend § 7-1216 to include:

“(7) TRANSMISSION EXPANSION PROJECTS THAT ARE NOT REQUIRED TO MEET A DEMONSTRATED GRID RELIABILITY NEED MAY NOT BE FUNDED THROUGH RATE INCREASES ON MARYLAND RATEPAYERS.”

These amendments, combined with other common-sense measures such as SB0034, SB0037, SB0116, and SB0332, will protect Marylanders and the State of Maryland from

corporate overreach, ensure responsible energy policy going forward, and provide economic benefits for Marylanders and our school systems.

Thank you for considering these critical amendments. I urge the Committee to support SB0316 with these changes to promote a clean energy future that benefits all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Bryan S. Price, Jr.