



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 408, Gas Service Regulatory Safety, (Flower Branch Act)

Submitted by Ana Martinez, Lead Organizer, CASA

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of House Bill 408, the Flower Branch Act. My name is Ana Martinez, I am a Lead Organizer at CASA. CASA is the area's largest immigrant-serving and advocacy organization with over 100,000 members in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

One of the many communities that we work in is the Long Branch area of Montgomery County, a community that was devastated by the tragedy that occurred on August 10, 2016, when a gas explosion led to the death of seven neighbors, caused severe injuries to dozens more and displaced and traumatized hundreds of people. We have been working with the residents since the explosion and continue to fight with them for justice.

After a lengthy investigation of the explosion lasting two and a half years, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) released a comprehensive report that included their findings and

recommendations. One of their many recommendations is that gas regulators need to be moved to the outside. Although no certain cause of the explosion could be determined, the report indicates that “...the probable cause [of the explosion] was the failure of an indoor mercury service regular with an unconnected vent line that allowed natural gas into the meter room where it accumulated and ignited from an unknown ignition source. Contributing to the accident was the location of the mercury service regulators where leak detection by odor was not readily available.”¹

The report makes several recommendations for how to prevent accidents like this in the future, including that service regulators be relocated outside of occupied structure. By moving the regulators to the outside, it would provide better air circulation, and prevent another situation where gas is building up pressure inside an apartment building. This is exactly what HB408 does.

Even though we have had a tragic event happen in our community, we still haven't learned. Just last year, another gas leak was detected by tenants in a building near to where the explosion occurred. After advocacy from the tenants, the utility company checked the regulators in the complex, and found minor leaks in multiple buildings, strong enough that people could smell it.

This frightened our tenants. One of the residents who made the report, at first was told that there was no gas leak. When he found that he was

¹ National Transportation Safety Board. (April 24, 2019). *Building Explosion and Fire, Silver Spring, Maryland, August 10, 2016*. NTSB/PAR-19/01, PB2019-100722, available at: <http://199.173.155.35/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/PAR1901.pdf>

given incorrect information he said, “I went to sleep last night, thinking everything was okay.” He was in shock that the same situation could have happened again. It wasn’t until this second incident, that most of the regulators were finally moved to the outside.

Our residents still remember the night of August 10, 2016 clearly. They remember running out of their building, the smell, the feeling of fear and confusion, and some even saw their neighbors jumping out of buildings.

We have a responsibility to learn from what has happened and ensure that we prevent dangerous situations like these from ever happening within our state. We have to take gas safety more seriously, and this a significant step forward.

For all of these reasons, CASA strongly support HB408 and urges a favorable report. Thank you for very much for your time.