

Thank you Mr. Chairman and good afternoon members of the committee. I'm Sophia Strickland, and I'm here as a student at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a resident of Baltimore City in support of House Bill 379.

House Bill 379 will put Maryland's energy and cost savings priorities on the Marylanders who suffer the most from high energy burdens: low-income families. Low-income Marylanders face a disproportionate energy burden where they are paying a much higher percentage of their income to utility bills. Low-income households spend on average 13% of their household budget on energy costs while non-low-income households spend only 2%. Very low-income households spend an average of 42% on energy costs, a number that is difficult to believe.

In public health, we like to assess the health impacts of all policies, not just policies directly related to doctor or hospital visits. Not being able to pay for adequate heating in the cold, being exposed to extreme temperatures, harmful gases, or mold and dampness has serious health effects that cannot be ignored. People living with live support equipment like dialysis or oxygen are put in immediate danger if they cannot access those devices. Extreme hot or cold can trigger respiratory illnesses like asthma, and families may have to choose between skyrocketing utility bills and spending money on food. I urge you to support House Bill 379 to save energy but also support to the health of Maryland's low-income families.

Thank you for your time.