



Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)

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Testimony on HB 0397 –
HB 0397: Electricity and Gas – Energy Suppliers
Economic Matters Committee

Position: Favorable

Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA) supports HB 0397.

As Director of Interfaith Power & Light DMV, I have been working with hundreds of Maryland faith communities for over a decade to support them as individuals and organizations in living out their values by making mindful energy choices.

While the system of energy choice in Maryland should in theory make individual ratepayers feel empowered, too often the reality is that deceptive advertising and exploitative billing have left the communities we work with feeling wary and distrusting of energy suppliers.

The Hebrew Bible forbids us to “put a stumbling block before the blind” (Leviticus 19:14), to use the information one has that others lack to gain advantage or cause them to stumble. Too often, that’s exactly how those selling residential energy customers supply contracts behave. Most regular folks don’t understand energy markets, and elderly and low-income energy customers are particularly unable to do extensive research. When energy suppliers offer “competitive” rates that don’t even save ratepayers money over standard offer service, or imply that they are in fact the utility rather than a supplier, or give elderly or poor ratepayers a low introductory rate while preserving the right to jack up rates later in variable rate contracts, or automatically renew ratepayers at higher rates by sending fine-print reminders they don’t understand, all of these constitute putting a stumbling block in front of Maryland ratepayers. It is the opposite of the purpose of a deregulated energy market to ensure transparency and choice for consumers.

While none of this relates directly to our work to encourage clean energy in Maryland faith communities through purchasing Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) and subscribing to community solar, the accumulated damage caused by unscrupulous energy suppliers makes our work advancing clean energy much harder. For years now, our efforts to invite Marylanders to see their energy choices as a way to do good has been hampered by the fact that so many energy suppliers are not marketing to or renewing ratepayers ethically. Too many folks we work with are now wary of all conversations around energy purchasing and energy choice because of their impression that this “water” is full of “sharks” and that any kind of energy contracting is a scam.

We urge a favorable report on HB 0397, and ask that the legislature support this and all measures that will help restore energy choice in Maryland to its original purpose, of empowering consumers to choose energy suppliers that are offering them the greenest product and the best deal.