



**SB503 - Public Utilities – Gas Service Regulator Safety  
Testimony before Senate Finance Committee  
Hearing Feb. 16, 2021  
Position: Favorable**

Madame Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Elizabeth Fixsen, and I represent the 700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **support of SB503**, requiring external installation of gas service regulators. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members).

This measure is aimed at preventing explosions due to accumulation of gas from a faulty or leaking gas service regulator. On August 10, 2016, a natural gas-fueled explosion and fire caused the partial collapse of Building 8701 in a 14-unit apartment building in Silver Spring, Maryland. The accident caused 7 deaths and injuries to 68 people as well as property damage exceeding \$1 million.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determined that the probable cause of the explosion was the failure of an **indoor** mercury service regulator with an unconnected vent line (gas service regulators containing mercury are being phased out). The unconnected vent line allowed natural gas to flow into the meter room, where the gas accumulated and ignited from an unknown ignition source. A contributing factor to the accident was the regulator being located in a space where leak detection by odor was not readily available.

The NTSB is urging that regulators be placed outside of buildings because any gas leak would go straight into the air instead of having a chance to build up inside a room as happened with the explosion in Silver Spring.

Providers of natural gas service have the responsibility of ensuring the safety of customers of this service, and based on the recommendations of the NTSB, exterior placement provides the least risk. Furthermore, Federal Pipeline Safety regulations require that each meter and service regulator, whether inside or outside a building, must be installed in a readily accessible location and be protected from corrosion and other damage, including vehicular damage.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

**We respectfully urge a favorable report.**

Elizabeth Fixsen  
Savage, MD

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