

February 23, 2022

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB381 – Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions - Commercial and Residential Buildings

Position: Favorable

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and all members of the Education and Transportation Committee

My name is Caroline Thorne and I'm a sophomore Government and Politics and Sustainability student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I live in College Park, and am from Silver Spring. I am in favor of HB831, and I emphasize the importance of the requirement for gas utilities to develop decarbonization plans, as well as the responsible development of commercial and residential buildings.

Growing up in Silver Spring means I experienced the natural gas explosion at the Flower Branch apartments in 2016. As a 15-year old, hearing about children and adults being injured, and even dying in this explosion and fire shocked me. I didn't think gas explosions like this would happen in Maryland, especially not in Silver Spring. At the time, I couldn't fathom how this had happened. Residents reported smelling natural gas for weeks before the explosion. Despite reporting the issue, the problem wasn't addressed, and people paid with their lives. This event was a focal point in my understanding of how human and environmental welfare are always intertwined. Natural gas is not safe nor environmentally responsible. I support the specific requirement of HB831 requiring gas utilities to develop decarbonization plans. We must stop using natural gas in order to protect human lives and our environment.

I speak from first-hand experience when I say Maryland is growing in all areas - in population, economy, and recognition. Growing up, I've watched Silver Spring bloom into an urban center and hub of activity. I know as we grow, people need places to live and jobs to work. However, it is necessary to develop these areas with strong consideration for our environment. It is essential to our growth that we reduce the number of greenhouse gasses being released into the environment. Buildings are responsible for 33% of greenhouse gas emissions. We are at a pivotal point in the climate crisis which requires us to take action. New buildings must be all-electric with net-zero requirement for large buildings, or an alternative compliance fee. Without actions like these, there is no point in developing a world which will not support human life in a few years.

I strongly support HB831's requirements, including all-electric new building standards, and a net-zero requirement for large buildings. I have watched Silver Spring grow with me, and these requirements are key to our efforts in adapting to and combating climate change. I urge a favorable vote on this bill, and request continued action to fight climate change.

Sincerely,

Caroline Thorne, University of Maryland — College Park, cthorne@terpmail.umd.edu