

February 23, 2022

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB831 – 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 Steven Berit, and I am a sophomore pursuing a double degree in Computer Science and Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park. Throughout my time at UMD, I have witnessed first-hand the damages greenhouse gas emissions have on our local and global environment and the importance of reducing these emissions.

Currently, UMD relies on a natural gas power plant to provide energy for the university. This supposedly “clean” form of energy is a misleading title when considering the fact that the methane released from drilling is 86 times stronger than carbon dioxide at trapping heat over a 20-year time period and is responsible for roughly 25% of the man-made causes for our current climate change crisis. The current infrastructure at UMD has also led to many potential dangers for students such as in 2021 when a gas leak occurred causing many buildings on campus to be forced to be evacuated. Along with the random stacks of dangerous plumes of steam pouring out of the ground and walls that stain our otherwise beautiful campus, it can oftentimes feel unsafe walking around campus. This is why it was so devastating to hear that our university has already begun working on replacing our current power plant with another natural gas power plant to last another 30 years.

This new power plant project was ironically named the Next Gen project which was a huge slap in the face for students who felt that the next generation had no voice in the project’s direction. As someone who was passionate about getting student input listened to in the development of Next Gen, I was selected as the only undergraduate student to sit on a NextGen Advisory Committee. That’s right I, myself was somehow tasked with representing over 30,000 student voices in a project that greatly affected every student that attended this university. However, even more to my dismay the committee met only 2 times in over a year, and my input wasn’t even considered. Instead, I felt I was used as a scapegoat by my university to say they checked the box of involving students in the process. It’s clear to me that the university is not going to listen to students on finding alternate solutions to natural gas which is why it is essential that legislation such as HB831 which takes the first step to introducing sustainable ideas such as an all electric building code must pass to ensure that our Next Generation is truly protected.

As a student, an advocate, and someone who cares for the future of my planet, I urge a favorable report on this legislation. Thank you.

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