

Testimony in Support of HB831- Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions:

Good afternoon Delegate Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

My name is Nina Jeffries, I'm from Takoma Park and currently a resident of College Park. I am a UMD student representing the MaryPIRG Student Climate Action Coalition. Requiring the gas utilities to develop a decarbonization plan is a key component of the bill that must be retained.

The science tells us we must move away from natural gas- both to protect our climate and our public health. When I was in high school, there was an explosion from a natural gas leak in the Flower Branch Apartments, no more than 5 minutes from where I lived. 7 people died and 65 were sent to the hospital. That weekend, I volunteered with tens of other people to help sort through donated clothes for those who had lost everything. Having not replaced out-of-date and dangerous components that allowed the gas to leak, Washington Gas settled in 2019 with affected residents.¹ I think we forget, natural gas is dangerous. According to an Harvard study, Maryland ranks in the top ten states for most premature deaths from all fuels burned in buildings.²

As our Student Government Association wrote in our comment on our County's draft CAP, "Natural gas is not "clean" and we cannot afford to perpetuate these deceptive narratives spread by the fossil fuel industry."³ On campus, the entire university of Maryland is run by its on-campus natural gas plant, making us the largest single emitter of greenhouse gasses in state government. It's embarrassing and dangerous, the superheated steam plumes burn students and struck natural gas lines cause disruptive evacuations. Due to the extensive infrastructure, the cost of moving campus away from natural gas ASAP was deemed too high, we will have to wait another 15-30 years. We cannot put more buildings on natural gas, because it becomes near impossible to move away. We need an all-electric new building code and we need the gas utilities to lead the way with decarbonization plans.

Natural gas is detrimental to the climate system. At the Senate hearing last Tuesday, throughout the 8 hours I was there, I heard a lot of pushback from the gas utilities on the Climate Solutions Now Act. Different excuses that amounted to "we don't have the will". Maryland must write into policy that these gas utilities decarbonize. Otherwise, they will continue to hijack the public process with false truths about their intentions, and continue to jeopardize my life, your life, and the lives of those that will come after us.

We urge a favorable report on this bill and remind you all that climate action cannot stop here.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/19/settlement-reached-in-2016-silver-spring-apartment-explosion/>

² <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/news/gas-biomass/>

³ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YIkhE98IIFH4E-4b7GwvovvDSaUZszM3wgYQ229dLYQ/edit>