



Testimony Prepared for the Education, Energy and Environment Committee on Senate Bill 0689
Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions - Alterations and Requirements

February 28, 2023
Position: Support

We write you to urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 0689, Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions - Alterations and Requirements, which alters the goals and requirements of certain energy efficiency programs to include certain greenhouse gas emissions reductions from electric companies and gas companies beginning January 1, 2024; requiring the EmPOWER Maryland Program to provide consumer rebates, and promote the use of certain federal rebates, for certain technologies; requiring the Department of Housing and Community Development and electric utilities to promote fuel switching from gas to electricity; etc.

The United Church of Christ has a long history of pushing for environmental justice extending back to our Commission for Racial Justice in the middle of the last century. That commission's report, "Toxic Waste and Race" was among the first of its kind to draw a direct connection between racial inequity and the burden of industry. It was the head of that commission, Rev. Dr. Ben Chavis, who coined the term "environmental racism" in fact. From the struggle in Warren County, NC in the late 1970s to the current moment, we have been in the struggle for environmental justice. In 2023, things for us are not all that different than they were back then in this regard. A great many of God's children still struggle to live in a world filled with easily avoided or remediated environmental dangers, and the long term impacts they can have on communal health. Both matters which policy is more than capable of addressing. This bill promises to provide these impacted citizens with more tools in their arsenal to deal with these dangers. And make no mistake, there are real dangers to be dealt with here.

Gas stoves are openly dangerous as designed. They produce nitrogen dioxide, many gas stoves do so at 200-300% the EPA recommended level. Exposure to levels like that in a home is the equivalent to living alongside a constantly idling car. It should come as no surprise then that studies have linked exposure to a gas stove in the home as a contributing factor in the development of childhood asthma. If your parents have a gas stove, you are 42% more likely to develop asthma in childhood. Which you will carry with you for life. We have alternatives that we can offer that save people at the margins from the cost of care for these chronic conditions, which is not insignificant. For that matter, the cost of gas is not insignificant itself. Offering consumers a choice here promises to make the living of their lives easier, more cost effective, and richer for your effort. If we can make the lives of Marylanders easier, longer, and healthier, shouldn't we?

Beyond the danger to individual health, gas stoves, and the gas infrastructure that supports their use, leak at a problematic rate. Even with handheld methane detectors, one is able to track down gas pipes leaking constantly in any given community. In all the talk of CO₂ with regard to climate change methane has flown under the radar for many. Which is only so insidious because methane has 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide in its first 20 years after release into the atmosphere. Though CO₂ has a longer lasting effect, methane's damage is more pronounced and much more immediate. Sudden and rapid changes



Justice & Witness Action Network-Maryland is a justice movement of local churches, clergy & justice leaders of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ in Maryland building & organizing power to secure a just and compassionate world for all.

are much more difficult for a society, particularly those living at its margins, to adjust to. And uncontained methane leaks like this promise to assist in making manifest that kind of rapid change. The Energy Savings Act offers consumers an off-ramp from the use of methane gas which will, in the long run, diminish use of that leaking infrastructure to the point that continued operation of it will become a question with time. This change in how we live and use the Earth's resources is necessary to preserve the world we all share for the generations to follow us. It is central to our faith that God has called us to be stewards of this world, and in this regard we can and must do better. Change has been ongoing for some time, and this legislation, if passed, will represent another important chapter in that story of change for the better. For healthier lives, and a healthier world to live in, we respectfully urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 0689 for the sake of all that breathes.

On behalf of the **Justice & Witness Action Network–Maryland** (*Central Atlantic Conference-United Church of Christ*)

John Kasander, Environment & Climate Justice Organizer



Justice & Witness Action Network-Maryland is a justice movement of local churches, clergy & justice leaders of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ in Maryland building & organizing power to secure a just and compassionate world for all.