



TESTIMONY FOR HB0731
Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement
(Ratepayer Protection Act)

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Embry

Committee: Economic Matters

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0731 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

This bill, if enacted, would update the Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement Plan (STRIDE) statute to require gas utilities to utilize the monies from the program to do what was originally intended – fix old, leaky gas pipes. What has been happening in the decade since STRIDE was passed is that the utilities have been using the surcharge that customers were paying to expand their gas infrastructure, instead of repairing the existing infrastructure, as intended.

This is a breach of faith with the public, and has cost the public billions of dollars that the utilities have funneled into their own profits. The utilities will now be limited to invest in the replacement of aging pipes with the highest risk of failure, and to utilize less costly alternatives than replacement where appropriate.

Our members are horrified that we have to once again try to rein in the utilities from gouging the public for their own gain. We would not be opposed to having the utilities offer rebates to their customers (particularly to their low-income customers) for the monies they have mis-appropriated. We feel that this change to STRIDE is the least we can do for the people of Maryland.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.