



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony prepared for the
Economic Matters Committee
on
House Bill 731
February 15, 2024
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to urge a public commitment to addressing climate disaster and its companion, environmental justice. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community of three ELCA judicatories in every part of our State.

In solidarity with all things now living, our community advocates policies that care for creation. We have recognized greenhouse gases as an environmental threat since 1993. We support public action for a greener future to mitigate climate catastrophe. We regularly join other interests in the United States that call for decarbonizing the commercial energy sector.

Last fall we stated opposition to a request from Baltimore Gas and Electric to the Maryland PSC for a consumer rate increase facilitating and expanding natural gas infrastructure. Our position was based on our support for iterations of the Climate Solutions Act of 2022. The intent of the Act is a Maryland energy regime transition toward carbon neutrality as rapidly as possible.

A publicly developed plan to achieve decarbonized energy production, articulated as regulatory coherence, is a better procedural choice for policy than *per se* debate about this or that commercial advantage. Utilities, previously understood to be public, provide a public good to which all communities are obligated.

Our support for **House Bill 731** leans on the Maryland Office of People's Counsel testimony before the PSC last fall. Advancing public financing for natural gas infrastructure is a prescription for, a) increasing, not reducing, greenhouse gas emissions, and b) accumulating private asset eligible for further public financing as stranded costs resulting from energy sector decarbonization.

Our community supports a developed regulatory protocol to implement goals for carbon reduction in the State's energy regime. We understand **House Bill 731** to be implementing that. We understand decarbonization to be in the interest of both the public good and safety. We, therefore, urge your favorable report for this bill.

Lee Hudson