



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS COMMITTEE

HB 731 - Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (Ratepayer Protection Act)

POSITION: Support

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 29, 2024

Since the emergence of the environment movement in the 1970's, the League of Women Voters has advocated for policies that protect our planet and promote public health. The League believes in protecting utility consumers and advancing the renewable energy transition.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **supports** the **Ratepayer Protection Act, HB 731**, which would update the Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement Plan (STRIDE) to protect Maryland utility consumers and hold utility companies accountable. This bill would have STRIDE prioritize replacing the highest risk gas pipes, and encourage cost-effective gas infrastructure spending.

Initially enacted in 2013, Maryland's STRIDE law enabled gas utilities to charge customers higher rates to cover infrastructure maintenance costs. The program was designed to maintain Maryland's aging gas infrastructure, but utility companies have used the program to profit off of unnecessary pipe replacements while ratepayers foot the bill. **HB 731** would bolster accountability for utility companies, and ensure that ratepayer dollars are being spent wisely.

The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 is clear that Maryland must move away from fossil fuels in order to reduce emissions 60% by 2031 and reach net-zero emissions by 2045. We must update Maryland's STRIDE law to advance the renewable energy transition. The **Ratepayer Protection Act** would align Maryland's STRIDE program with its climate goals.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **strongly urges a favorable report on HB 731.**