



Testimony on HB731
Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (Ratepayer Protection Act)
House Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 28th, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee;

I write today on behalf of Ceres to urge a favorable report from the Committee on HB731 - The Ratepayer Protection Act which will modify the Strategic Infrastructure and Enhancement Plan (STRIDE). Ceres is a sustainability nonprofit working to advance leadership among investors, companies, and capital market influencers to drive solutions to the most pressing climate and clean energy solutions facing states today. We believe it is imperative to update the STRIDE program to prioritize safety and cost-effectiveness in gas infrastructure spending.

Updates to the existing STRIDE law are crucial to ensure that Maryland ratepayers are not shouldered with the burden of gas system buildout. Under the current program, utilities have failed to prioritize fixing the riskiest pipes. The Maryland People's Council estimates that nearly \$2 billion has been spent on new gas infrastructure, including a \$2 monthly surcharge on all customers' bills. To meet Maryland's ambitious climate goals, it is imperative that Maryland utilities transition their investments away from fossil fuels and work toward finding least-cost alternatives to further gas system buildout. The proposed reforms outlined in the Ratepayer Protection Act, including the prioritization of highest-risk pipes, the use of modern leak detection technology, and a "fix it first" approach, are essential steps in moving Maryland toward a more cleaner energy future.

Under Maryland's Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, the state has set robust commitments to transitioning away from fossil fuels to combat climate change, it is crucial that the state's approach to gas infrastructure aligns with these goals. By investing in cleaner, safer energy alternatives and ensuring that gas infrastructure spending is both prudent and efficient, we can work towards a more sustainable future. It is time to prioritize the interests of Maryland residents and ensure that the gas infrastructure is both safe and environmentally responsible.

We strongly urge a favorable report on SB548/HB731 Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Mauk
Director, State Policy, East
Ceres