

**Testimony Supporting HB 397
House Economic Matters Committee
February 22, 2024**

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Committee,

Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVa) is a grassroots organization working directly with religious communities of many faiths as we respond to the climate crisis. In Maryland, our organization has relationships with over 900 congregations across the state. We are called by our different faith traditions to use our voice in protection of our common home.

Our breath connects us to each other and to life. Our faith communities understand that our breath is for singing praise — not for breathing smoke and pollution. This session we are using our breath to speak out for a safer, cleaner, and more efficient future. **We respectfully request a favorable report on HB 397, the Working for Accessible Renewable Maryland Thermal Heat (WARMTH) Act.**

The WARMTH Act would create pilot projects of super-efficient and reliable neighborhood geothermal systems while maximizing on incoming federal funds and existing infrastructure. Network geothermal unlocks dramatic energy efficiency improvements by having multiple homes and buildings working together. The rights of way already have conduits for gas pipes that are ready and available for network geothermal pipes.

The pilot projects created by this bill will be aimed at equitable and just electrification by requiring they be in neighborhoods with 80% low- and moderate-income residents. As we work towards the state's climate goals to reduce gas emissions, we must ensure that overburdened and underserved communities are being prioritized by minimizing cost barriers to healthier homes. The technology behind neighborhood geothermal heating is efficient, reliable, and can be constructed today. This is an already proven, carbon-free technology that will minimize additional electric demand on the grid.

This bill will ensure that family-sustaining jobs for current workers continue. Labor standards in this bill prioritize maintaining work for those who work on gas infrastructure and ensure prevailing wages for construction on the projects. Because geothermal work is similar to gas distribution work, minimal additional training ensures job security. We welcome the several unions supporting this bill, and affirm the need to ensure job security for gas system workers in a new clean thermal energy future.

The WARMTH Act aligns with the state's aggressive climate action plans. Maryland has a statutory requirement to reduce gas emissions to 60% of 2006 by 2031 and the state is further required to transition to a net-zero status by 2045. Meeting these targets is imperative to sustaining our common home and caring for our neighbors.

Our faith communities across the state are already working together to care for our common home and neighbors, for this reason **Interfaith Power & Light (D.C.MD.NoVa) respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 397, the Working for Accessible Renewable Maryland Thermal Heat (WARMTH) Act.**



We are documenting the harms of burning gas in our homes.

For well over a year, we and our partners at Action in Montgomery have been testing nitrogen oxide levels in gas-burning kitchens in homes across Montgomery County, particularly in low and moderate-income high-rise buildings such as The Enclave in White Oak and Cider Mill Apartments in Gaithersburg.

Over and over again, we find that when their stoves are on, many Marylanders are routinely exposed to levels of nitrogen oxide indoors exceed the EPA's outdoor standard, raising concerns about asthma and the many other respiratory problems exacerbated by gas stove pollution.

So many Maryland families are eager to electrify at home for the health of their loved ones and protecting the climate.

On December 5th, Ana Argueta and Lorena Joya delivered the following remarks (in Spanish) at Good Hope United Methodist Church in Silver Spring before a gathering of nearly 400 Marylanders convened by Action in Montgomery, People Acting Together in Howard, Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA), and Maryland Sierra Club:



Good evening. I am Ana Argueta. I am a mom to three children and I have been organizing other parents and renters to improve our schools and our community. Good evening. I am Lorena Joya. I am a mother, part of the South Lake PTA, and Safe Places.

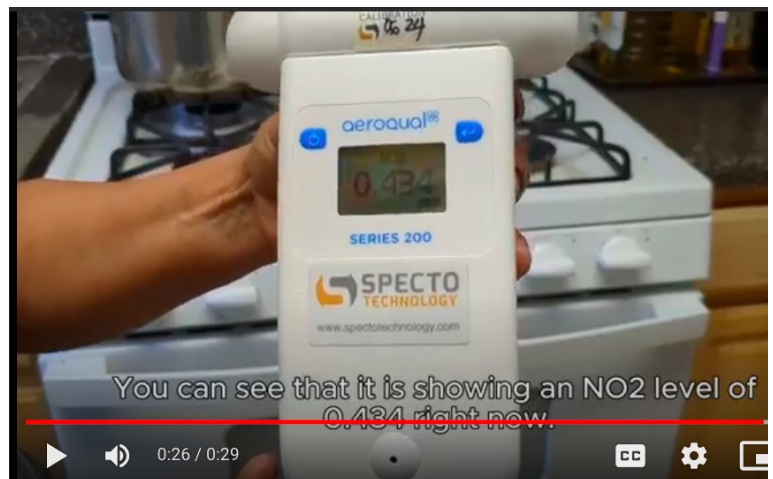
We are here for three reasons:

I have learned that using a gas stove I am poisoning my home and my lungs with NO₂. Using a gas stove and gas-powered HVAC, I am also contaminating the environment. Not using methane gas will avoid the risk of both explosions and pollution.

We took a video of doing the NO₂ testing at Ana's apartment. Let's watch: "Hello, I am Ana Argueta. I live in Silver Spring. This is my stove, which I turned on 20 minutes ago. This is an NO₂ meter. You can see that it is showing an NO₂ level of 434 parts per billion."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says that outdoor levels of NO_x above 100 parts per billion are dangerous for our health. And what we measured inside my home was more than four times what the EPA says is healthy.

The NO₂ in my home is not unique. We have measured NO₂ levels in over 200 apartments and homes, and we have measured very high levels. I invite our guests to raise the papers with the NO₂ tests. The red papers are measurements we took [in homes in Montgomery County, Maryland] that were higher than what the EPA recommends for the outdoors.



Many children who live in older apartment buildings have asthma. NO₂ causes asthma and makes it worse and affects brain development. Other toxins from burning methane, or natural gas, cause cancer. We have other problems in our apartments like toxic mold, dirty AC filters, and a lack of ventilation. **Changing from gas appliances to appliances like electric induction stoves or electric heat pumps- could improve our health and the conditions of our apartments while also reducing greenhouse gasses and other pollutants.**

