



## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support - HB 731 - Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (Ratepayer Protection Act)

To: Chair Wilson and the Members of the Economic Matters Committee  
From: Phil Webster, PhD, Lead Advocate on Climate Change  
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.  
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The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) strongly supports **HB 731 - Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (Ratepayer Protection Act)** and urges a FAVORABLE report by the committee.

The UULM-MD is a statewide faith-based advocacy organization, with over 1,200 members, based on the Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists believe in *“justice and equity in human relations”* and *“respect for the interconnected web of all existence of which we are a part.”*

The Ratepayer Protection Act meets several very important goals to protect Maryland from the ravages of Climate Change and Environmental Injustice.

The Climate Solutions Now (CSN) Act of 2022 set very ambitious goals for reduction in emissions of greenhouse gasses. Methane gas is an extremely potent greenhouse gas, more than 80 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>. However, it only has a lifetime in the atmosphere of approximately 10 years as compared between 300 to 1000 years for CO<sub>2</sub>, which means that we would get immediate benefits from stopping the use of methane. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) estimates the fossil fuel sector accounts for about 35% of anthropogenic methane emissions. Clearly Maryland must drastically reduce methane emissions. would go a long way to mitigating climate change.

Part of the Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (STRIDE) Program does upgrade pipelines that leak methane. However, the gas utilities are also upgrading the gas infrastructure with pipes that have a useful lifespan that is well beyond when we would need to phase them out to be in compliance with the CSN, which requires that Maryland become carbon neutral in the next 21 years.

So the gas utilities are investing ratepayers money to expand a gas infrastructure that will be unused or obsolete within 21 years. This means, with the required greenhouse gas reductions, this investment will become a stranded asset, which we, the ratepayers, will still have to pay for.

On top of this, as methane gas usage decreases, the cost of the infrastructure will then be supported by a decreasing number of users. This will drastically increase the cost of methane gas per customer. Unfortunately, low and moderate income communities, whose members are more likely to rent than own the properties they reside in, will bear this cost.

The wasteful expansion in the gas infrastructure, which lines the pockets of the gas companies, will ultimately be paid for by the most disadvantaged portion of Maryland's population.

This is not a sound investment for Marylanders.

This cannot be allowed to happen.

As you can see, investing in the electrical grid now is a much smarter investment and a better use of our funds. That's why we support this bill and urge a FAVORABLE report in committee.

*Phil Webster, PhD*

Lead Advocate, Climate Change UULM-MD