

To whom it may concern:

My name is Thomas Butler and I live in the Remington neighborhood of Baltimore city, zip code 21211. I want to thank the committee for hosting this hearing and for listening to public comment during the legislative process. I also want to thank my Senator, Senator Mary Washington, for her hard work and dedication to serving us as an elected official.

I am writing in regards to SB0682, which will close loopholes in what kinds of charges utility companies can charge to ratepayers. I am strongly in favor of this bill for several reasons.

First, I think that as the price of energy continues to go up but wages do not, we will continue to struggle to make household energy affordable for people like me. I am afraid of rising rates especially due to the climate changes occurring that will raise energy costs in a variety of ways such as more expensive infrastructure maintenance, cost of installing 'green' energy (I do support green energy and also want to acknowledge that this is a more expensive, if resilient, way of providing energy than easily extracted fossil fuels). If we don't control extra spending on the part of investor-owned utility companies, then shareholders will get a free ride off of the profit of a monopoly business without the government intervention needed to advocate on behalf of ratepayers like me. Against them, my only recourse is what you, the State Legislature of Maryland, do on my behalf. Please do not let me down.

I have heard cases about BGE and Washington Gas lobbying against policies in Howard and Montgomery county to transition homes and buildings to cleaner energy. I also heard of how FirstEnergy charged Potomac Edison customers in Maryland for lobbying and bribes and was required to pay \$1.7 million in refunds to Marylanders in 2023. My utility company, BGE, also charges for membership to the American Gas Association. I do not want my money going to their efforts to lobby, as I have absolutely no say in this matter. My only say is what the Maryland State Government authorizes itself on my behalf, which should definitely be a tighter scrutiny of how ratepayer money is spent.

Colorado, Connecticut, and Maine passed similar legislation last year, so Maryland would not be a first in doing this. I think it is time for Maryland to protect ratepayers amid rising energy prices, and help bring transparency to investor-owned utilities. I am sure that the companies and investors would argue that there is no need for Maryland to shoulder the cost of such oversight, and they will police themselves. This is always a recipe for selfish behavior on behalf of the investor-owned utilities: if they do mean that their spending is justifiable, then being required to show justification will not harm them, it will only legitimize their position even more. If they intend to hide where ratepayer money goes, then this bill will clearly harm their ability to do so. Either way, I see clear benefits and little downsides to incentivizing good investor-owned utility behavior through the oversight proposed in SB0682.

Sincerely,

Thomas Butler