



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 1217 Natural Gas Generating Facilities - Authorization

Date: February 21, 2025
To: House Economic Matters Committee

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**
From: Gussie Maguire,
MD Staff Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** HB 1217, which allows for the construction and operation of new natural gas-burning energy generation systems until the state is able to meet 50% of its energy needs from renewable sources. The bill includes nuclear energy in its “renewable” category, but while nuclear energy does not generate the same harmful emissions as burning fossil fuels, it still depends upon a finite fuel source. It is important to distinguish it from true renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy. In any case, opening the door to additional fossil fuel-fired power generation in the state would be a step backwards for Maryland’s air quality, water quality, and climate goals.

In addition to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other pollutants, gas-fired power plants emit nitrogen oxides (NOx) into the atmosphere. Atmospheric nitrogen, from power plants, vehicle emissions, and other sources, enters the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries through either dry deposition of particles or attached to precipitation, and contributes about one-third of nitrogen of the nitrogen reaching the Bay¹. NOx emissions have declined over time, thanks in large part to reductions from point sources like power plants². Introducing additional gas-burning energy generation systems to the state of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay’s airshed would go back on that progress, increasing nitrogen loads to the Bay and exacerbating algal blooms and anoxic dead zones. Larger dead zones imperil already-stressed aquatic species, including striped bass and menhaden.

Finally, despite natural gas’s reputation as a “clean burning” fuel, its emissions pose the exact same threats to the climate as other fossil fuels. Natural gas is primarily composed of methane, which is even more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. Any leaks in pipelines to or equipment at a natural gas-burning facility would contribute methane, while normal energy generation activity would also release low levels of methane along with carbon dioxide. Increased GHG emissions do not align with the state’s goals and investments already made to combat climate change.

CBF urges the Committee’s UNFAVORABLE report on HB 1217.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

¹ <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/threats-to-the-bay/air-pollution>

² https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-02/documents/appendix_1_atmos_n_deposition_allocations_final.pdf

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.