HB1035 - UNFAVORABLE
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HB1035, The Next Generation Energy Act

Meeting of the Committee

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Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Elders Climate Action Maryland, I urge an unfavorable report on HB1035.

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state.

Each day, we see the climate crisis more clearly. We know that Maryland is at risk for sea level rise, flooding from intense rainfall, heat waves, and other extreme weather events. Maryland can also be a leader in moving us to a safer, cleaner future where we all can thrive. The clean energy transition is an essential part of that future.

As elders, we find it odd to encounter a Next Generation Energy Act that promotes the use of a fossil fuel that we all know from childhood. Methane gas is not a clean fuel. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that leaks during every stage of the process from drilling to combustion. Burning that gas releases another greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, as well as NOx and other air pollutants that are a significant hazard to people living or working nearby.

Some have proposed carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a solution, but as recent research from Stanford University[1] has shown, that approach is costly and does not address the harms from air pollution. If the CCS is not powered by renewable energy, it will increase carbon dioxide emissions. It also adds to the time required to build a new power plant. Currently, there are no storage facilities or pipelines for the CO_2 in or near Maryland.

Hydrogen has been mentioned as an alternative, but there are many associated problems[2] with greenhouse gas emissions, costs, and other issues. Biofuels are also mentioned as an alternative, but without carbon capture and storage, they would add significant amounts of CO_2 emissions. Even with CCS, they would be a significant source of NOx, particulate matter 2.5, and other harmful air pollutants.

The energy situation in Maryland is a matter of great concern because of problems with PJM and increasing demand for electricity from data centers and other uses. Costs have risen for ratepayers and will continue to rise. But it also a very fluid situation. The number and size of data centers that may come to Maryland is unknown. Innovations like DeepSeek and improved demand management make their power needs difficult to estimate. A data center study such as the one proposed in HB0270, the Data Center Impact Analysis and Report, would help to clarify those issues.

Also, we are lacking a clear picture of what can be done to improve Maryland's electrical system while meeting the essential goals we committed to in the Climate Solutions Now Act. Adding new nuclear energy to our grid is the most expensive way to increase generation, and a nuclear plant that starts the planning process today may not be online by 2035. There are hopes that new small modular nuclear reactors will be less expensive and more quickly built, but none are yet in commercial use.

There are other options that need to be fully considered before we commit to new nuclear power in Maryland. Those include increased solar generation, increased energy storage, demand management, and virtual power plants.

A study like the one proposed in HB1037, the Energy Resource Adequacy and Planning Act, would be very helpful in clarifying the potential role of nuclear energy and other key issues in Maryland's energy future.

But we shouldn't wait for the study to begin to address these important issues. HB0398, the Abundant, Affordable, Clean Energy Act, offers a no-regrets strategy Maryland can pursue while doing further analysis and planning. The storage provisions and changes to SRECs are particularly important at this time.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge an unfavorable report on HB1035.

1 https://environmentamerica.org/center/updates/new-study-finds-carbon-capture-ineffective-and-costly-compared-to-investing-in-renewable-energy/
2 https://maca.earth/gaf/