



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB998

Natural Gas - Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement (Ratepayer Protection Act)

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 13, 2025

Member Agencies:

211 Maryland

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Energy Advocates

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Jewish Community Relations Council
of Greater Washington

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports SB998, which alters the required contents of a certain plan that a gas company may file with the Public Service Commission for proposed eligible infrastructure replacement projects to include certain descriptions, demonstrations, analyses, and notifications; and alters the required findings of the Commission in considering whether to approve a certain infrastructure replacement plan.

BGE gas customers have seen their delivery rates triple since 2010, due in large part to STRIDE. At the same time, BGE's profits tripled from \$147 million in 2010 to \$527 million in 2024. There's still time to protect Washington Gas customers from these massive rate hikes. But without intervention, all Maryland gas customers' rates will continue to rise, making home heating increasingly unaffordable. A pipe replacement program that properly prioritizes leaks would cost less, meaning smaller bill increases, while actually making us safer. The Ratepayer Protection Act gives the Maryland Public Service Commission new tools to ensure that ratepayer dollars are spent responsibly by codifying requirements on safety and cost effectiveness.

The lower the amount of income a Marylander's household brings in a month, the larger the amount of that income that is required to go toward their utility bill – otherwise they will not be able to live comfortably. Maryland households with incomes below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level had to spend an average of 37% of their household income to pay home energy bills in 2022 – before any of the recent rate hikes took place. It is understood that these statistics have skyrocketed since the recent BGE rate hikes across the State. The Ratepayer Protection Act contains important protections that will help keep low-income consumers connected to essential home heating utilities during the transition to greater electrification of home heating.

Without intervention, Maryland gas customers are projected to pay \$40 billion for the STRIDE program over the next twenty years, driven in large part by utility profits. This is an impossible ask, especially for our Marylanders living in poverty. It is imperative that action be taken, and MAP believes that this bill is the proper vehicle to address many of the concerns. **MAP appreciates your consideration and requests the committee provide a favorable report on SB998.**

***Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP)** is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*