SIERRA CLUB
MARYLAND CHAPTER

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Committee:	**Education, Energy, and the Environment**
Testimony on:	**SB 716, Public Utilities - Nuclear Energy - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard and Procurement (Decarbonization Infrastructure Solutions Act of 2025)**
Position:	**Oppose**
Hearing Date:	**March 6, 2025**

The Maryland Chapter urges an unfavorable report on SB 716, the Decarbonization Infrastructure Solutions Act. The Sierra Club opposes the State incentivizing and/or facilitating *new* nuclear energy as an energy source and is especially concerned about adding nuclear energy to the Tier 1 category of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and establishing a procurement process for nuclear energy.

Nuclear Energy Should Not Be Considered in Tier 1 of the RPS

The RPS should be focused on accelerating the deployment of new, clean renewable energy facilities – a definition that does not include nuclear energy. While the Sierra Club is neutral on adjusting the current RPS target to recognize *existing* nuclear as a current carbon-free energy source in Maryland if functioning truly as an accounting tool – as seen in the ENERGIZE Act – the Chapter strongly opposes adding nuclear energy as a Tier 1 renewable source.

Nuclear Energy is Not Safe, Affordable, or Clean

Nuclear power is expensive and would increase financial risks to Maryland consumers. Nuclear power is two to six times more costly per megawatt-hour than wind and utility-scale solar, and new nuclear plants can take twice as long to come online.[1] This is why a ratepayer backed procurement process would be needed to make a nuclear power plant economically viable.

There are many recent examples of attempted nuclear deployment around the country that highlight the expense and delays inherent in this energy source. For example, the Vogtle nuclear project in Georgia started in 2009 with a predicted cost of $14 billion. When the final unit started operation in 2024, 16 years later, it had a price tag of more than $35 billion.[2] In another recent

[1] Lazard, "Levelized Cost of Energy: Version 16.0." 2023. https://www.lazard.com/research-insights/2023-levelized-cost-of-energyplus/
[2] Bright, Zach, "After Vogtle, what's next for nuclear?" April 30, 2024, E&E News, https://www.eenews.net/articles/after-vogtle-whats-next-for-nuclear/

example, NuScale's small modular reactor project for a small municipal utility in Utah and Idaho saw costs balloon from $4.2 billion in 2018 to $9.3 billion in 2023, before being canceled.[3]

Nuclear power is not renewable, clean energy. Nuclear power comes with safety risks and highly hazardous wastes that threaten our drinking water and have no permanent solution in sight.

Furthermore, Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) are unproven technology. While new design SMRs are being proposed, there is no commercial scale working project yet.

Approach to Existing Nuclear Energy

While Sierra Club policy guidance allows for the extension of existing nuclear facilities when retirement of the facilities would likely lead to new fossil generation, continued operation is not without potential harm, which should be noted. If the Committee takes further action on any incentives or support for existing nuclear – the Calvert Cliffs reactors – we would encourage the Committee to use the approach seen in SB 316, the Abundant Affordable Clean Energy Act.

Conclusion

The General Assembly has many opportunities this session to pass legislation that supports the deployment of solar, wind, battery storage, and energy efficiency – energy solutions that are ready, affordable, and effective today and can be implemented more quickly to address Maryland's energy needs. We urge the Committee to act on these opportunities instead.

We respectfully urge an unfavorable report on SB 716.

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[3] Ramana, M.V., "The collapse of NuScale's project should spell the end for small modular nuclear reactors," Utility Dive, Jan 31, 2024.
https://www.utilitydive.com/news/nuscale-uamps-project-small-modular-reactor-ramanasmr-/705717/