



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

To: Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, Senators Brooks, Benson and Lewis-Young and Delegate Bofofo

Subject: Support for the Better Buildings Act (HB 973/SB 804)

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) is a faith-based advocacy organization based on Unitarian Universalist Values, including justice, equity, and interdependence. Working to mitigate, adapt to, and build resilience for climate change is central to our beliefs. I am the Lead Advocate for the Climate and represent over 5,000 Unitarian Universalists in Maryland.

In 2022 Maryland adopted the Climate Solutions Now Act, mandating net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, a mere 20 years from now. One major shortcoming of this legislation was the omission of polluting gases from buildings. The Better Buildings Act would correct this for all new buildings and I urge you to support this legislation. Of all the tough decisions that need to be made concerning protecting the climate, this should be the easiest one! From the climate and economic perspectives, which I will outline below, passing this legislation should be a slam dunk.

Yet it is not! The gas utilities in Maryland, and across the country, are waging a campaign of misinformation and distortion against electrification. Why? To protect stockholder profits over the interests of the Maryland citizens. This argument has been clearly and convincingly articulated by the Maryland Office of People's Counsel and I will not repeat here. The Ratepayer Protection Act (HB419/SB998), is also before the General Assembly, and I also urge you to support this common sense legislation.

There are a number of reasons to support the Better Buildings Act and I will cover several of them.

Negligible Impact on the Electric Grid This legislation will have a negligible, if not zero, impact on the electric grid in the near term. Maryland has its peak load on the electric grid in the summer due to the need for air conditioning. Use of heat pumps in new buildings for winter heating will not exceed the summer peak for many years to come. The Brattle Report from the Public Service Commission (required by the Climate

Solutions Now Act) stated that “results show that peak load growth thru 2031 with *high electrification* of the building sector will be comparable to, or less, than the growth rate the Maryland system has seen over the past 40 years.”

Saves Consumers Money Numerous studies have shown that the construction cost of all-electric buildings is comparable to dual fuel buildings. While heat pumps (with both heating and cooling modes) are slightly more expensive than air conditioners, this cost is nearly offset by eliminating the cost of the gas infrastructure. Most significantly, heat pumps are two to three times more energy efficient than gas furnaces leading to lower operating costs over the life of the building.

All Electric Buildings Climate Friendly Modern high efficiency methane gas furnaces are 90-95% efficient. This means that 5-10% of the methane gas is not combusted and simply goes up the chimney, along with the CO₂ from the combustion. Methane gas is approximately 80 times more potent greenhouse gas than CO₂.

Building Right From the Start Retrofitting a building for electric appliances is substantially more expensive than just doing it right from the start. Dual fuel buildings will emit greenhouse gases over the lifetime of the gas appliances, generally 15-20 years. This is about the time that the Climate Solutions Now Act requires net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

All Electric Buildings are Safer There have been (thankfully) few cases where a building with methane gas has exploded. Of particular note was the relatively new commercial building on Columbia that exploded in 2019. It was very fortunate that this happened on a Sunday morning when very few people were in the building. There would have been an untold number of fatalities if it was during business hours.

And finally, while this legislation makes sense from both the climate and economic perspectives, it also has great symbolic value. It clearly supports the intent of the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022, which was overwhelmingly passed by the General Assembly.

I strongly urge you to pass this critical legislation, future generations are counting on you.

Thank you,
Phil Webster, PhD
Lead Advocate for the Climate
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