

**SUPPORT – House Bill 444**  
**Interference With Critical Infrastructure or a Public Safety Answering Point -- Penalties**  
**House Judiciary Committee**

Columbia Gas of Maryland, Inc. (Columbia) supports HB 444 as introduced. The legislation amends Maryland law to prohibit a person from denying access to or impairing the functioning of critical infrastructure, which Columbia interprets to include natural gas utility equipment, facilities and pipelines. Under the proposed legislation, a person who denies access or impairs the functioning of critical infrastructure is guilty of a felony and subject to imprisonment or a fine or both.

Columbia supports public policies protecting its equipment, facilities and pipelines from attack or interference. Ensuring we can safely and reliably provide energy to our customers is our priority. Columbia works with industry, federal and state agencies and organizations to develop standards and best practices to manage cybersecurity risks and to promote the protection of our critical infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there have been attacks on utility facilities and infrastructure. These attacks can be carried out by various actors including terrorists, extremist groups, disgruntled individuals, nation-states seeking to destabilize a region, or criminals aiming to disrupt operations for personal gain.

Recent examples include shooting incidents at power substations in the United States where individuals have targeted electrical substations with gunfire, causing power outages. There has also been vandalism of energy infrastructure where unknown actors have deliberately damaged electrical equipment or transformers. According to an April 2024 report by POLITICO's E&E News, analysis of Department of Energy data showed the nation's power providers reported 185 instances of mostly physical attacks or threats against critical grid infrastructure in 2023, beating the previous record number of reports from 2022.

In addition, in October 2024 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) highlighted in its 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment (HTA) that domestic and foreign adversaries are almost certain to continue posing threats to the integrity of the nation's critical infrastructure over the next year. This is partly because they believe that targeting these sectors could have widespread effects on U.S. industries and the standard of living.

Mitigating attacks and interference with critical infrastructure is a joint effort between at-risk industries and federal, state and local governments. Legislation such as HB 444 can assist in the possible prevention of future attacks and interference of critical infrastructure.

Columbia believes the requirements of House Bill 444 are appropriately and reasonably crafted policies related to the protection of Maryland's critical infrastructure and supports the legislation as introduced.

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