

**Testimony for: HB1532 – Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act**

**Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment**

**Organization Submitting:**

**Person Submitting: Christine Pendzich**

**Hearing Date: March 25, 2026**

**Position: UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today on HB1532. Third Act Maryland urges you to vote unfavorable on HB1532. This bill does not, in fact, lower energy costs for Maryland residents in any appreciable way. Instead, it raises our costs in a number of material ways while hurting our ability to reach the State's climate goals:

- Cutting the State's signature, cost-effective energy efficiency program – EmPOWER – can only raise costs over time. Ratepayers may save a few dollars per bill in the short run (which may be the bill's only goal with this measure), but will pay more over the medium term as highly inefficient homes demand more energy. This cut especially hurts our low income fellow residents.
- Third party energy suppliers, whose predatory pricing was well documented for SB 01 last year, are now allowed back into Maryland. And HB 1532 lets them charge per kWh prices that are 10% above the regulated utility price. This measure may provide choice but it certainly doesn't address or help with affordability.
- It is stunning that HB 1532 includes a provision for support to nuclear power plants in the State, allowing them 15% cost over runs. Nuclear power may be carbon free but building it certainly is not cheap. This is a provision for higher costs, not lower, in the foreseeable future.
- Solar power, when coupled with battery storage, is well known to be the lowest cost form of power now available. HB 1532 provides only weak support for it. The reverse auction provisions for utility scale solar only last two years, which does not give developers much time to gear up and complete projects. In addition, we strongly recommend that the changes that were made to the balcony solar provisions in the House to limit the system size to 391 watts be reversed. The system size should be set again at the 1200 watts level, similar to the bill Virginia just passed.

In the meantime, we are very concerned that the Affordable Solar Act (ASA) is apparently not being voted on today and so will not meet the crossover deadline. The ASA is a necessary companion to HB 1532, if the State wishes to truly address energy challenges in a rational and logical manner. Without the ASA, many aspects of the current bill are short sighted, will raise costs in the near term and will make it harder to achieve Maryland's climate goals.

Solar energy is the least costly and fastest way to get new in-state electricity. The Affordable Solar Act (ASA) would have helped address the energy affordability crisis by making it easier for residents to generate and use solar energy at home. It would have allowed renters and condo residents to use Portable Solar Energy Systems (i.e., “balcony solar”) that don’t involve permits, contractors, or interconnection agreements. The ADA also would have restructured the current Renewable Portfolio Standard to provide better incentives for Solar Renewable Energy Credits, tailored to different market segments such as residential, non-residential, and community solar. For larger utility-scale projects, it directed the Public Service Commission to conduct a competitive procurement, driving down the cost of the incentive and creating the best value for ratepayers. It would have spurred 4,000 MW of new, in-state generation, reduce dependence on out-of-state energy, lower costs, and create good paying jobs.

In summary, we always support saving ratepayers’ money, but we should not do so in short-sighted ways that will cost more in the long run, push us further behind in meeting our climate goals, and ultimately make electricity not only more directly expensive, but also more costly through climate harms that it helps generate. Therefore, we enjoin you to vote **UNFAVORABLE** on HB1532.