



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

Hearing Date: [HB1532](#) - Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act
Bill Sponsor: The Speaker
Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Submitting: Ruth White and Liz Feighner for Howard County Climate Action
Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members,

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing approximately 1,400 subscribers. We are also a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#). Our organization works with residents and ally organizations to promote a safe climate and clean energy future. Specifically, we have worked extensively on clean energy and on building electrification to help Maryland achieve its ambitious climate mandates, including net-zero emissions.

[HB1532](#) - Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act is supposed to bring relief to ratepayers burdened by skyrocketing energy costs. Unfortunately, modest ratepayer relief is eclipsed by other troubling policies in this bill that will increase energy costs in the future, make Maryland less energy secure, and significantly undermine Maryland's climate mandates.

While **HB1532** has some good provisions rolled from bills that we supported, we are deeply concerned that major provisions will move us significantly backwards on climate and ratepayer protection. Below are various aspects of **HB1532** of serious concern:

EmPOWER

HB1532 rolls back the EmPOWER goals - delaying efficiency gains and bill savings for 9 years. We should redouble our commitment to energy efficiency to provide the greatest relief to ratepayers overall. Counting solar as part of EmPOWER further erodes energy efficiency targets and subsequent savings. We urge the legislature to reinstate the EmPOWER original targets to reduce energy usage, lower pollution and give meaningful long-term cost savings to ratepayers. However, we support repealing gas utility companies' requirement to participate in EmPOWER which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage beneficial electrification.

Solar

The Affordable Solar Act which did not pass the House would position Maryland for the solar expansion we need long term. Key provisions from the Affordable Solar Act need to be included to provide meaningful forward movement in greenhouse gas reductions, in addressing the climate crisis. This bill provides no reliable incentive/market signal for long-term solar investment, the cheapest and fastest source of new generation. Unfortunately, it directs ratepayer monies to the most costly and slowest source of new generation, nuclear energy, even allowing 15% cost overruns. Nuclear, however, will take many years to come online. In the meantime, increased demand, without ramping up solar and wind, will increase use of fossil fuels (i.e. gas). The ratepayer "benefit" on bills will be mostly or entirely offset by higher prices/lost savings. This is a direct result of capacity price increases, because more electricity use means higher fixed costs passed on to ratepayers.

Data Centers

Data centers are pushing up electricity demand and fueling skyrocketing electricity prices and this bill does not meaningfully address the costs on ratepayers caused by data center demands on our power grid. Rather than

placing reporting and energy management requirements on the largest source of load growth and rate increases (i.e., data centers), the bill simply asks data centers to “register” while providing tax incentives with no strings attached.

We appreciate that this bill includes some of the provisions of **SB992** -(Public Utilities - Large Load Customers Registration and Demand Response Program). However the large load registry definition should be tightened and include a requirement to register.

The demand response requirements from Large Load Customers - Electric System Interconnection and Demand Response Program (**HB0940/ SB0596**) should be added to this bill.

Finally, since both the PSC and local municipalities (where most of the decisions on data centers are made) should be involved in planning, we urge you to include the Data Center Planning and Transparency Act (**HB1411**) in **HB1532**.

Retail Supply

Rather than retain the consumer protections enacted in 2024 in SB1, the bill provides a 10% premium for higher retail suppliers, at a cost to consumers. To be specific, **HB1532** increases a retail contract length from 1 to 3 years, and allows suppliers to offer up to a 10% premium adder to electric and gas contracts. A codified, industry rate premium won't save ratepayers money, because it leaves a small premium in law forever which can easily be increased in the future. Over a 3-year contract, suppliers could buy inexpensive energy or see regulated rates possibly decrease, but still charge a higher rate than SOS. These are the types of practices that led to higher retail supply rates for many Marylanders. We urge you to delete these provisions from the bill. But we strongly recommend changes to this part of the bill.

Nuclear

HB1532 ignores the fact that there is a long lead time for nuclear power to come online resulting in an increase in emissions. It will take ten to nineteen years for developing new nuclear plants and for refurbishing old nuclear reactors. This will result in an increase in Maryland greenhouse gases (GHG), as reliance on fossil fuels are increased in the interim. This increase in GHG emissions during the long delay will set back Maryland's legislated mandate for net zero GHG emissions by 2045. Any increase in fossil fuel combustion used as a bridge awaiting new nuclear power to come on line will result in an increase in pollution related premature deaths. Siting of fossil fuels plants usually results in racial-ethnic disparities from increased toxic exposures and poor health outcomes.

For these reasons, we **oppose this** bill and recommend a **UNFAVORABLE** report.

Howard County Climate Action

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