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March 23, 2026

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building,
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: FAVORABLE– HB1532 – The Utility RELIEF Act

Dear Chair Feldman and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), I submit for the record our comments on House Bill 1532, The Utility RELIEF Act. GHHI is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit organization headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. Our mission is to address the social determinants of health, opportunity, and racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe and climate-resilient homes.

GHHI is the nation's lead authority on the benefits of a whole-house approach that aligns, braids and coordinates energy efficiency, health and safety to create an integrated home repair and retrofit delivery model to improve health, economic and social outcomes in line with the state's climate goals.

GHHI is a state weatherization contractor for the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) low-income EmPOWER program and local weatherization agency for the DHCD Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) program. GHHI has also been a regular recipient of Maryland Energy Administration Residential Energy Efficiency grant programs. GHHI participants alongside other advocates in the EmPOWER Maryland proceedings and workgroup meetings, delivering comments to the Public Service Commission on the program.

Support for HB1532

GHHI is supportive of HB 1532 as the bill takes steps to address energy affordability issues in Maryland while prioritizing low-income residents. We are especially appreciative of the investment in the energy efficiency programs at DHCD and MEA that support low-income households.

Energy costs hurt lower income communities and communities of color the hardest due to older housing stock and less efficient appliances that drive up energy needs. At the same time, a lack of budgeting flexibility decreases the ability of many of these households to manage rising costs, forcing them to cut back on other essentials, risk unhealthy living conditions, or fall behind on bills.

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Concern with Cutting Back on EmPOWER

GHHI greatly appreciates the legislature’s prioritization of the low-income portion of the EmPOWER Maryland program and that the bill does not cut back on the DHCD programs that offer free energy efficiency projects to low-income households.

However, GHHI worries that cuts to the overall program will have a negative impact on the energy efficiency workforce and risk raising energy demand in the state in a way that increases costs for everyone. GHHI works with many contractors who deliver services through both the state low-income programs and utilities programs. The utility programs help support a robust and skilled workforce that serves clients across the state. The savings delivered by this program reduce the need for capacity costs and new infrastructure that are shared among all ratepayers.

Additionally, GHHI has concerns that including solar savings in the utility programs will not offer meaningful program benefits given that solar already is incentivized through other initiatives. The result seems likely to be that including solar will simply reduce the energy efficiency delivered to state residents without increasing the net benefits.

Overall, GHHI is concerned that the size of the cuts to the EmPOWER goals will have negative effects at a time when capacity limits and growing energy demand are straining the grid. With affordability a challenge for residents, having programs that offer support with making energy efficiency investments ensures more Maryland residents can make these upgrades.

Energy efficiency is a key strategy to meeting state energy needs, improving housing conditions, building strong local economies, and addressing social determinants of health. EmPOWER offers multiple benefits, including reducing energy costs. EmPOWER also meets its cost-effectiveness requirement by delivering over two dollars in benefits for every dollar spent.¹ With rising PJM capacity prices and expenses for transmission rising, energy efficiency will be especially valuable in the coming years, likely leading to an even greater cost benefit performance.

Given the benefits of energy efficiency – lower bills, less electricity demand, and cleaner air – GHHI urges the legislature to reconsider the degree to which they are cutting the program.

Support for Efforts to Consider Third-Party EmPOWER Administration

GHHI is supportive of the bill’s direction for the Public Service Commission (PSC) to look closely at third-party administration of the utility EmPOWER programs. GHHI expects there to be value in having state-wide consistency in programs which can help with customer awareness, administrative streamlining, and alignment with other statewide initiatives through MEA or DHCD. With important state goals for energy and climate in the coming years, having a third-party program may create greater opportunities for coordinating program across utility territories. GHHI supports the PSC looking closely at the costs and benefits of moving to this system of administration and supports the bills directing the PSC to look thoughtfully at this option.

¹ <https://www.pscmaryland.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-EmPOWER-Maryland-Energy-Efficiency-Act-Standard-Report-Final.pdf>

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Support for Uses of SEIF Funding

GHHI supports the bill continuing to prioritize money in the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) to low-income energy efficiency and affordability programs while ensuring that funds are invested every year.

GHHI applauds the bill for using SEIF funds to support EmPOWER program costs, preserving investments in energy efficiency while reducing the rate-payer impacts.

GHHI also supports the dedicated investments for low- and moderate-income energy efficiency and conservation as well as dedicated funding for clean energy and energy efficiency in buildings. These investments reduce energy costs, cut energy demand, support local jobs, improve housing quality, and address social determinants of health. GHHI is glad that these funds can support heat pumps which improve air quality while providing efficient heating and cooling to buildings.

Support for General Efforts to Reduce Utility Rates

GHHI supports the steps the bill takes to reduce utility rates. We see many clients struggling with rising energy bills. Rising utility costs can make it impossible to affordably keep a home at a safe temperature or can force families to cut back on other essentials.

GHHI appreciates language in the bill that restricts utilities' ability to recover cost overruns and requires utilities to evaluate advanced grid technologies rather than building more expensive infrastructure. We also appreciate the steps to charge datacenters for their share of the energy costs through large-load customer rates rather than having households stuck with the bill.

Summary

GHHI supports HB1532 the Utility RELIEF Act. GHHI appreciates the attention and actions the legislature is taking to lower energy costs for Maryland residents. It is key to helping families live both affordably and safely in their homes.

Respectfully submitted,

Signed by:

Ruth Ann Norton

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Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative

CC: Justin Barry, Director of Energy Initiatives, GHHI

