

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

TO: Senator Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy; Cait Kerr, State Policy Manager, The Nature Conservancy; Humna Sharif, Climate Resilience and Adaptation Director

POSITION: Support with Amendments HB1532 Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) **supports with amendments** HB 1532 offered by the Speaker, Chair Korman, and Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo. TNC's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work in more than 70 countries and all 50 U.S. states. With the support of more than one million members globally, TNC has protected and restored ecosystems and species for nearly 75 years.

Climate change threatens to undo decades of our successful conservation work and fundamentally alter the future. TNC is committed to helping reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming to no more than 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures. This goal cannot be achieved without a rapid transition to a clean energy economy. A clean energy future will require a different approach to energy planning and procurement. Updating energy policies in Maryland is essential for the well-being of nature, our economy, and our communities.

HB 1532 combines changes to many aspects of the Maryland's energy ecosystem. TNC would specifically like to highlight the below components as they relate to meeting clean energy goals and limiting greenhouse gas emissions in the state.

1. Grid Utilization – Amendment Requested

In the definitions section of the bill, we request the following additions:

- **Utilization** - the extent to which electric grid assets are being used to meet the needs of customers during all hours of the year.
- **Metrics** - measures used to assess the efficiency and performance of electricity grid infrastructure

Additionally, we request the inclusion of the below language in the bill text:

- No later than December 15, 2026, the Commission shall provide a report to the General Assembly on the status of grid utilization in Maryland sufficient to assess the efficiency and performance of each utility’s electricity grid infrastructure in its distribution and transmission systems. The report shall assess utility performance on grid utilization metrics including:
 - a. Total kWh delivered in relation to total potential deliverable kWhs;
 - b. Peak load in relation to load limits;
 - c. Duration of peak load periods; and
 - d. Any other information the Commission deems necessary.
- Metrics shall be calculated with sufficient temporal and locational detail to assess grid utilization, but at a minimum:
 - a. Seasonally;
 - b. System-wide; and
 - c. At the feeder, substation, and transmission line level.

Maryland is facing an energy affordability challenge driven by an aging grid, insufficient transmission capacity, and higher demand, among other reasons. Our current power system is built to serve spikes in demand that are infrequent, and this often leaves unused grid capacity on the table. TNC’s goal in recommending these amendments to HB 1532 is to help our state balance new electricity demand within the existing power system where and when there is spare capacity – thus reducing the need for new transmission lines to address our current energy crises. This pathway allows the system’s fixed costs to be shared by more customers, putting downward pressure on rates for residents.

2. Maryland Climate Crisis Equity Act – Amendment Requested

The Nature Conservancy supports the inclusion of [HB 1199/SB 590](#) The Maryland Climate Crisis Equity Act within the Utility RELIEF Act. The original bill language calls on the Maryland Department of the Environment to study and develop a framework for an economy-wide cap-and-invest program in Maryland by 2027. Such a program would move our state further along the path to reducing emissions and meeting climate goals as set forth in the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022. This would be done in conjunction with the Maryland Commission on Climate Change, the Department of Transportation, the Maryland Energy Administration, and the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities. By setting a cap on emissions levels in the state that declines over time, this market-driven policy requires polluters to purchase emissions allowances. Revenue generated from these allowances can then be reinvested in the state to further fund climate mitigation efforts that will benefit all Marylanders.

We know that Maryland is currently facing a structural deficit and will need to find creative solutions to fund and achieve our climate goals. Programs like cap-and-invest can provide multiple benefits to Maryland, through assisting in reducing emissions over time while also reinvesting funds back into the state through programs that enhance and advance climate mitigation technologies, build resilience within communities, and ultimately reduce costs to consumers, both directly and indirectly. The Maryland Climate Pollution Reduction Plan (CPRP)

of 2023 identified cap-and-invest as a promising pathway through which the state can close the gap between current emissions levels and our commitments and goals. The Nature Conservancy strongly recommends including language authorizing a study to move our state closer to enacting an economy-wide cap-and-invest program, which will ultimately reduce carbon emissions while keeping an eye on affordability for Marylanders.

3. EmPOWER – Request No Funding Cuts

TNC would also like to express our strong support for EmPOWER Maryland, the state’s energy efficiency program. We request that **no funding cuts** are made to this program and that the Senate restore EmPOWER in HB1532. Maryland’s EmPOWER program is one of the leading energy efficiency programs in the country, providing more than \$2 in savings for every \$1 invested. If cuts are made, Marylanders would lose out on programs like rebates on energy efficient appliances, tune-ups on HVAC systems, and free or discounted energy audits for people and businesses, among other savings. Cutting energy efficiency programs will increase our state’s energy use, and delay progress on emissions reductions goals set within the Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022.

4. Advanced Transmission Technologies – Support

TNC recognizes the need for Maryland to support grid modernization strategies that use the latest technologies to meet our state’s growing energy demand. It is imperative that utilities upgrade our grid as efficiently, cost-effectively, and rapidly as possible, while also protecting sensitive ecosystems and ensuring community buy-in during the process. This legislation contains important provisions to meet Maryland’s energy distribution needs by including provisions to encourage adoption of Advanced Transmission Technologies (ATTs) and Grid Enhancing Technologies (GETs).

As our state’s energy demand grows, and as more renewable energy and distributed energy sources are connected to the grid, the traditional vertically integrated system design is no longer sufficient to meet Maryland’s energy needs. Including ATTs and GETs in existing and new transmission lines can unlock our grid’s potential to deliver safe, reliable and clean power to Marylanders in a more cost-effective way. TNC recognizes that Maryland needs new transmission solutions to power the future and that planning, siting and constructing high-voltage transmission lines is a time-consuming process, requiring thoughtful planning and analysis. New transmission lines can take up to 10 years to build, but Marylanders are facing the pressure of rising energy bills now. In the near term, ATTs and GETs are tools we can use to ensure we’re getting the most out of the grid we have.

5. Resiliency Hubs – Support

Last, but not least, TNC supports the inclusion of funds for resiliency hubs in HB 1532. Maryland identified resiliency hubs as an important tool to build community resilience in the face of weather-related disasters. In past years, Maryland has dedicated funding towards their establishment, through the Strategic Energy Investments Fund (SEIF), and we are pleased to see

this line item included in this year's energy package as well. No two resilience hubs are the same; general requirements include having up to five days of power and water supply, ability to store medication and provide first aid, and ability to serve as weather-controlled locations during disasters. These community-based centers support resilience-building well beyond disaster relief services though in that they function as places where communities can more directly learn from, engage in, and help shape future resilience planning actions for their neighborhoods.

TNC appreciates the leadership of Senate President Ferguson, Speaker Peña-Melnyk, Chair Feldman, Chair Korman, Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo, the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment, and the House Environment and Transportation Committee in advancing forward looking, energy efficient, affordable, and climate goals-friendly energy policy in Maryland. Thank you for your consideration of these amendments and requests shared by TNC in this testimony. **We urge a favorable with amendments report on HB 1532.**