MARYLAND LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

March 25, 2026

Favorable with Amendments: HB 1532 - The Utility RELIEF Act

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV is supportive of a number of key provisions in HB 1532, The Utility RELIEF Act, which we outline in this testimony. We appreciate the efforts both chambers have been making this session to address skyrocketing electricity bills. Maryland LCV is also supporting energy affordability through our Power Maryland Forward campaign, which includes the deployment of solar and storage, defense against more fossil fuels and unchecked utility profits, while getting the most out of the electricity grid we have. We are supportive of the core concepts of our Power Maryland Forward campaign that have been woven into HB 1532 as it passed the House (outlined below).

HB 1532 also includes several important funding provisions we support, in particular mandated funding from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to support critical programs including energy efficiency for low-and-moderate income households, transportation-emission reductions, and electric system resiliency programs. The approach in HB 1532 is similar to one of our priority bills, HB 1040, “Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund - Mandated Uses - Climate Change Programs,” but with a percentage approach instead of a dollar allocation to programs. On these provisions, we would support an expansion of the RGGI allocation definition to allow funding for important initiatives related to electric school bus deployment, microgrid installation, and resiliency hubs.

Our concerns about HB 1532 have consistently focused on provisions addressing the state’s energy efficiency program, EmPOWER. As it passed the House, the language in HB 1532 reduces the EmPOWER goal to 1.75% for the next three years, with a scale up over the next ten years to ultimately return the goal back to 2.5%. More concerning is allowing community solar projects to count towards the EmPOWER targets, which could result in pitting two programs against each other: one focused on generation (community solar) and one on efficiency (EmPOWER). These are two important programs that provide differing benefits and should remain distinct.

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While the House limited the scope of community solar application to the EmPOWER program to a 20% cap of solar that could count towards the EmPOWER goal, this approach is still counterproductive to the ultimate goal of reducing energy costs through efficiency. Our recommendation is to support the removal of the gas EmPOWER program, which the bill does, move towards a third party administrator for the program, which the bill also does, and keep the rest of the program in place. This will ensure EmPOWER charges will decrease and the program will continue to be effective.

With these considerations in place, we would urge a favorable report on HB 1532. Additional positive provisions that should remain in the bill include:

Utility Accountability

- Caps the amount ratepayers pay for utility employee salaries
- Requires utilities in Maryland to join our regional grid operator, PJM, which prevents them from charging an “adder” on utility bills for joining voluntarily
- Adds transparency measures on utility bills that provide more information about rate increases
- Prevents utilities from using a forecast year as part of its multiyear ratemaking cases

Grid Efficiences

- Strengthens the Public Service Commission’s review of new overhead transmission line proposals by requiring CPCN applicants to demonstrate that their internal planning processes evaluated alternatives to the proposed line, including the use of ATTs, alternative routing options, and distribution-level technologies or modifications
- Closes a loophole about underground transmission lines

Clean Energy Generation

- Streamlines permitting for rooftop solar
- Creates a pathway for the next steps on net energy metering in the state as we approach the 3 GW cap
- Introduces a reverse auction for solar financing
- Introduces a balcony (portable) solar program in Maryland

Data Center Reform

- Creates a large load registry to move towards preventing phantom load
- Includes intent language about data center demand/response and supplying their own energy
- Reduces the minimum size of a large load user to 25 MW (from 100 MW)