

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

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Favorable with amendments

March 25, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

I write with both gratitude and concern about HB1532, the Utility RELIEF Act.

This bill takes some positive steps, but also includes unfortunate reversals of progress that we cannot afford. We will not have the ability to ask forgiveness if we get this wrong.

While I have several areas of disagreement in this bill, I will mention just three.

DATA CENTERS

The bill encourages data centers to bring their own energy sources (good), but does not make it mandatory (not good). Amendments are needed

- to require data centers to bring their own new **and clean** energy sources with battery backup, not diesel generator backup;
- to require community input into all aspects of data center development in their community;
- to require that data centers not be built in areas that are already overburdened with polluting industries; and
- to provide tax benefits to the state and counties.

EMPOWER

I am also very concerned about the backward steps in the Utility RELIEF Act regarding EMPOWER. This bill takes money from the EMPOWER program for customer rebates. While reducing consumer costs is desirable, this is not the way to do it.

This bill will reduce the targets for greenhouse gas emissions for each electric company. Starting in 2027, the targets were supposed to be a 2.5% reduction of greenhouse gases annually. This bill changes the targets to 1.75% for 2027 through 2029, 2% for 2030 through 2032, and 2.25% for 2033 through 2035, not returning to 2.5% until 2036. That's a decade from now. We do not have that time. We are in a race to drastically reduce greenhouse gases now, before the situation becomes irreversible. Anything that does not urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions necessarily harms us all and increases consumer costs in other sectors such as health, food, insurance and more.

BALCONY SOLAR

Clean energy is cheaper, faster to build, and healthier for us and the planet. This bill does include the part of SB0341/HB0345, the Affordable Solar Act, which deals with plug in solar (also known as balcony solar), and that is good. However, in the Affordable Solar Act, plug in solar was permitted up to 1200 watts. In the Utility RELIEF Act, it is only permitted up to 391 watts per electric meter. There needs to be an amendment to increase the amount permitted to 1200 watts.

This is not an exhaustive list of the amendments I urge you to consider. Others wiser and more familiar with the strengths as well as the shortcomings of this bill are urging you to consider additional changes.

These are critical times, with no second chance – we must act with urgency, not compromise or timidity.

Thank you.

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Baltimore County