



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations 88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB 1532

March 25, 2026

TO: Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 1532: Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1532 **with amendments**.

HB 1532 represents a forward-looking solution to Maryland's energy challenges by simultaneously expanding renewable energy development and, more importantly, easing the financial burden on ratepayers. By investing more into local clean energy generation and grid modernization, the legislation creates a pathway for increased renewable capacity—such as solar, wind, and battery storage—while improving the efficiency of the state's transmission system. These investments are designed not only to strengthen long-term energy reliability but also to reduce overall supply costs, which directly benefits consumers. At the same time, the bill delivers immediate relief through measures and program reforms that are expected to save Maryland households from ballooning utility costs. By pairing clean energy expansion with targeted cost-saving strategies, the RELIEF Act demonstrates that advancing renewable development and lowering energy bills can and should go hand in hand.

To ensure local governments can meet the expectations of the RELIEF Act and avoid unequal burdens, the Baltimore City Administration requests the following amendments:

1. Add a subclause to further define a "Large Load Customer," to exclude water and wastewater infrastructure
 - a. Recommended language: p. 26 (3) "Large load customer" means a commercial or industrial customer for retail electric service that:

Does not include a municipal utility or municipal critical infrastructure

It is explained in HB 1532 that it is the "intent of the General Assembly that residential retail electric customers in the State should not bear the financial risks associated with large load customers interconnecting to the electric system serving the State." Adding the above exemption ensures this large load customer clause doesn't simply switch the cost burden from electric residential customers to water and wastewater residential customers, protecting municipal owned utilities for water and wastewater from increasing energy costs.

2. Increased clarity to protect the health, safety, and cultural preservation, currently ensured through local permit processes.

- a. Recommended Language: p. 16 – Line 3, (2)(I)(1) – Add:

Where the County or Municipality determines feasible for routine installations, and non-detrimental to health, safety, or cultural preservation, “complete a remote or in-person...”

Routine solar installations on modern homes, post 1980s construction, in much of Maryland are going to be different than installations in historic, older, or rowhomes that may have antiquated electric infrastructure, shared walls, or require additional processes for historic or cultural impacts. The intent is to make it clear that the requirements – a 5-day review process and overall fast tracking solar permitting – will still be within the bounds and requirements elsewhere in the law and prioritize health and safety foremost.

3. Clarify that this bill does not omit regulatory historic preservation review processes.

- a. Recommended language: P16 – Line 29, (4) - Add:

This section does not apply to a restriction on use on property either individually designated or located within a district designated by the applicable local jurisdiction to be of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance under § 8-105 of the Land Use Article.

While locally designated historic properties in Baltimore City regularly receive approval for solar panels in local historic districts, the application of historic design guidelines to proposals can result in modifications to the locations of solar panels to prevent damage to historic materials or minimize visual impacts within historic districts. Review of proposed solar installation projects must occur prior to permit issuance and installation. Historic exemptions are precedent in the State’s Building Energy Performance Standards.

4. Preserving the greenhouse gas emission reductions targets for electric and gas companies (p. 49) and EmPOWER program funding.

The proposed cost reductions are short term in nature and will have long term bill impacts, that are outsized in Baltimore, in particular by removing gas utilities from EmPOWER programming. **In Baltimore City, more than 60% of residential homes are heated by natural gas, compared to 40% in the State. This funding change removes a residents’ ability to access support for efficient boilers and weatherization to drive down the cost of heating their home over the life of the equipment, 15 or more years.** EmPOWER has a track record of success and has helped to support lower utility bills. It should be preserved or expanded, not decreased in times of financial constraints, especially when impacts would disproportionately impact those it is most intended to support.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** report on HB 1532.