

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

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Third Act Maryland

Person Submitting:

Hearing Date: March 25, 2026

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today on HB1532. Third Act Maryland, a national organization of climate activists with more than 1500 members statewide, urges you to vote unfavorable on HB1532.

We appreciate that this bill includes many policy priorities we support. We are very concerned that the Affordable Solar Act (ASA) is apparently not being voted on today and so will not meet the crossover deadline. The ASA is a necessary companion to this current bill, and without the ASA many aspects of the current bill are short sighted and would impair Maryland's climate goals.

The beneficial aspects of this bill are largely consumer protection and policies designed to help ratepayers, and do not help the state meet our climate goals. Other parts of the bill will actually move us backwards on climate. Given this latter issue and the latest news that the House isn't moving the Affordable Solar Act, we recommend an unfavorable vote on this bill. We are including here comments on some parts of this current bill to inform any future work on these issues.

EmPOWER

It is important to remember that solar projects are distinct from energy efficiency, and therefore solar projects should not be counted toward any EmPower goals (which focus on energy efficiency). We oppose any provisions to weaken the EmPOWER Program, specifically, the reductions in annual greenhouse gas reduction targets for the residential and commercial sectors (the DHCD low-income program is not affected). The 2.5% target originally scheduled to take effect in 2027 would not be restored until 2036 - a 9 year delay. The ratepayer "benefit" on bills will be mostly or entirely offset by lost savings. This is a direct result of capacity price increases, because more electricity use means higher fixed costs passed on to ratepayers.

Nuclear Generation – We oppose the provisions that would subsidize nuclear energy to the detriment of ratepayers and allow a 15% cost overrun (effectively an invitation to

overspend through subsidy) and urge you to strike them any future bill. Also, the bill changes the definition of "Zero-Emissions Credit" (ZEC) to make it extremely vague and potentially far more expensive.

Solar Energy – In any new version of this bill we also strongly urge inclusion of the **Affordable Solar Act** provisions as written to provide a long-term solution to increased development of solar projects of all sizes.

We also strongly recommend in future versions of this bill striking the changes that were made to the balcony solar provisions in the House to limit the system size to 391 watts and return it to the 1200 watts system, similar to the bill Virginia just passed.

Solar energy is the least costly and fastest way to get new in-state electricity. The Affordable Solar Act (ASA) would have helped address the energy affordability crisis by making it easier for residents to generate and use solar energy at home. It would have allowed renters and condo residents to use Portable Solar Energy Systems (i.e., "balcony solar") that don't involve permits, contractors, or interconnection agreements. The ADA also would have restructured the current Renewable Portfolio Standard to provide better incentives for Solar Renewable Energy Credits - tailored to different market segments, i.e., residential, non-residential, and community solar. For larger utility-scale projects, it directed the Public Service Commission to conduct a competitive procurement, driving down the cost of the incentive and creating the best value for ratepayers. It would have spurred 4,000 MW of new, in-state generation, reduce dependence on out-of-state energy, lower costs, and create good paying jobs.

Data Centers

In any future bill, we urge you to include the requirement for large load customers to register in order to qualify for current sales and use tax and property tax exemptions for data centers. Furthermore, to strengthen the demand response program to lessen the impact of data centers on the grid, especially at peak times, we would like the Senate to add the demand response requirements from **Large Load Customers - Electric System Interconnection and Demand Response Program** ([HB0940/SB0596](#)). Finally, to strengthen the requirements for transparency and to aid not only the PSC but also local municipalities in planning (where most of the decisions on data centers are made) we would recommend including the **Data Center Planning and Transparency Act** ([HB1411](#)) in future legislation.

In summary, we always support saving ratepayers' money, but we should not do so in short-sighted ways that will cost more in the long run, push us further behind in meeting our climate goals, and ultimately make electricity more expensive. Therefore, we urge you to vote unfavorable on HB1532.