

Written Testimony: HB723 (SAVINGS ACT)

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Hello, my name is Cynthia Blair-Khan and I am a concerned resident of Howard County, Maryland. I am testifying in support of HB723, legislation to contain the exorbitant and unsustainable energy costs being imposed on Maryland residents and families.

The SAVINGS Act is an important first step toward cost containment, but it represents only a fraction of the policy action required. While I recognize that infrastructure maintenance is necessary to ensure reliable energy supply, utilities should not have free rein to spend billions of dollars on projects with poorly defined public benefit — and then expect ratepayers to absorb those costs without transparency, justification, or meaningful public oversight.

If utilities fail to meet the goals identified in the SAVINGS plan, the Commission must have clear authority to impose meaningful consequences. These should include fines, reduced return on investment, or denial of cost recovery for implementation expenditures. Penalties must be severe enough to motivate compliance, not treated as a minor cost of doing business.

I also want to raise the issue of data centers. Their rapid, largely unconstrained buildout is a significant contributing factor to peak demand and grid strain. The infrastructure required to support these facilities is effectively being subsidized by ratepayers – while these enterprises earn massive returns on their investments. This is untenable. Large commercial consumers must bear infrastructure costs proportional to their usage, not pass them on to Maryland families.

My family relocated from New Jersey to Maryland three years ago, drawn by its welcoming communities, beautiful neighborhoods, and reasonable cost of living – a place where my husband and I could retire comfortably. In the two years since, we have watched energy costs rise at an alarming rate.

We were proactive. In our second year, we updated the solar array on our home and replaced our HVAC system with high-efficiency dual-fuel heat pump units, assuming that electricity costs would be more manageable than propane. But with rate fee hikes continuing to phase in over the coming months, that assumption no longer holds. Our energy bills have nearly doubled, a concern shared by many of my neighbors.

We are now researching a combination of additional solar panels, wind, and geothermal systems to achieve greater energy independence. This will put us anywhere from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars into debt, but we see no long-term alternative that allows us to remain in our home and retire as planned. No family should have to make that choice.

I am sharing my story because what is happening feels like the exploitation of consumers who have no affordable energy alternatives. It has pushed me toward activism and community organizing – finding ways to mobilize my neighbors rather than allowing their concerns to go unheard. When residents are forced to choose between paying their utility bills and putting food on the table, that is not a rate dispute. It is a crisis.

I urge the General Assembly to take the following actions:

- Establish a formal, mandatory public comment process before any utility rate increases are approved, ensuring that elected officials and constituents have a meaningful voice.
- Require large commercial and industrial energy consumers, including data centers, to fund their own infrastructure interconnections rather than shifting those costs to residential ratepayers.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms in the SAVINGS Act, including meaningful financial penalties when utilities fail to meet stated cost-reduction goals.

The SAVINGS Act is a necessary first step and I applaud the delegates for their efforts, but it must be paired with stronger oversight, transparency, and accountability to deliver real relief to Maryland families.

Thank you, Delegate Terrasa, for your leadership on this issue. I hope you will consider my testimony in support of the SAVINGS Act and the broader package of policies needed to bring energy costs under control in Maryland. Marylanders should not be priced out of their homes by unchecked utility spending.