

January 30, 2026

Task Force to Study Restructuring Maryland's Electric Utility Industry (HB54)

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee—

My name is Tess Niehoff, and I write today as a Baltimore resident, neighbor, and a member of the Baltimore Public Power Campaign in strong support of House Bill 54.

How many times have you turned on a light switch today? How many members of the committee today woke up and turned on a coffee pot, or toasted a bagel, or grabbed something out of the refrigerator? Electricity powered the pump bringing water to your showerhead, it powered your furnace to battle these crisp winter mornings. Electricity helped charge electric vehicles, it helped run conveyor belts, it allowed machines to run Maryland's economy. In hospitals throughout the city and state, electricity allowed ventilators, dialysis machines, and surgical robots to play critical roles in letting doctors save lives.

Does this not meet the metric of a true public good? By this description, would anyone on this committee argue that electricity is not a human right? When the day comes to decide whether a rolling brown out will impact a hospital or a data center, who do you want to make this decision, your neighbors? Or Exelon shareholders?

You may think this example is hyperbole. But in my past life working as a Foreign Service Officer for the Office of Critical Infrastructure for USAID in Kyiv, Ukraine, I had to see public utilities make unthinkable decisions many times over. And while I hope that the United States will never know the destruction of an unjust war, it is not far fetched to think that our current energy infrastructure will have to face the warp speed challenges of the next industrial revolution, what feels like the inevitable rise of artificial intelligence, and cyber and intelligence attacks on critical energy infrastructure.

I am not sure that anyone would argue that BGE or their parent company Exelon is well equipped to deal with this fast-coming change, all while accountable to the whims of Wall Street. Across Maryland, families are struggling with rising electricity bills that far outpace wages. Too many households spend an unsustainable share of their income just to keep the lights on. This isn't just an affordability issue; it's an issue of accountability and fairness.

House Bill 54 is an important first step toward addressing these challenges. By creating a task force to study affordability drivers and the impacts of different utility ownership models on Maryland ratepayers. This bill allows us to take an honest, transparent look at whether the current investor-owned utility model is truly serving the public interest —

or whether alternatives like public or cooperative ownership could deliver more affordable, reliable, and accountable service.

This task force must not predetermine outcomes. It should simply ask the question: *Is there a better way?*

In seeking to answer this question, the task force should take a close look at the 2,000 public utilities serving communities across the country. From Nebraska to Florida, public utilities prioritize the needs of their customers, not faraway shareholders. Public utilities [consistently provide](#) cheaper, more reliable, and cleaner energy than privately owned utilities, in addition to investing more in local communities and providing residents with more control over decisions about access to this human right.

At a time of aging infrastructure, climate challenges, and increasing energy costs, Maryland cannot afford to ignore innovative solutions. Studying public power models is not radical; it's responsible government.

We urge you to support HB54 and give Marylanders the opportunity to explore an energy system that puts people first.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tess Niehoff

Baltimore Public Power Campaign