

Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, Committee Members:

I support HB0561 because it will give localities important powers to negotiate with utilities on behalf of the members of their communities. Because of serious issues with gas regulations affecting ratepayers that I discuss at length below I feel very strongly that local communities deserve to have more control over their electric power, including choice of truly clean energy sources.

Because of the enormous dollar amount of energy utility lobbying and campaign contributions I fear that individual local governments must step in and advocate on behalf of their constituents, acting more like the D.C. Public Service Commission than the Maryland Public Service Commission, to overcome the advantage energy companies long have had in writing legislation favoring their shareholders over other stakeholders.

I agree with former chairman Kevin Hughes that the Maryland Public Service Commission failed its ratepayers badly in the merger agreement it agreed to between Washington Gas Light and Alta Gas. See his dissenting opinion in <https://www.psc.state.md.us/wp-content/uploads/Order-No.-88631-Case-No.-9449-AltaGas-WGL-Merger-Order.pdf> The District of Columbia Public Service Commission did a far better job of protecting ratepayers.

Governor Hogan wangled \$103 million from the WGL Altagas merger to use for expanding natural gas infrastructure. “The expansion of this valuable resource is another example of how Maryland is open for business.” <https://news.maryland.gov/mea/2017/12/04/maryland-additional-parties-reach-161-million-agreement-on-washington-gas-acquisition/>

But natural gas is a very dirty fuel because of the polluting “mud” used to “frack” – crack open shale gas deposits and the methane leaks during fracking and pipeline transport.

The Maryland Energy Administration has held very few, difficult to attend public hearings on expanding natural gas infrastructure, for their Maryland Energy Infrastructure Program. <https://news.maryland.gov/mea/2019/08/08/maryland-energy-administration-launches-new-maryland-energy-infrastructure-program/>

Expanding natural gas infrastructure may be beneficial to developers and the contractors they employ, but it seriously harms attempts to move towards renewable sources for energy by encouraging electrically powered heat pumps – including those for cold climates -- for heating, and inductive and other electric cooking.

In making alternatives to gas attractive to consumers both re rates and environmental concerns it is essential to give local jurisdictions the power to aggregate consumers and support true renewable energy providers, not dirty sources including fracked gas and energy from trash incineration, fecal waste combustion. (Unless done as cleanly as some “poop processors” the National Renewable Energy Lab in Golden, CO, has been developing. No link at <https://www.nrel.gov/bioenergy/index.html> but I have seen/photographed digesters.)

Local energy aggregators must have the power to investigate and reject dirty energy such as that mentioned above that is to often generated to provide Renewable Energy Credits. (Food & Water Watch (FWW). “Cleanwashing: How States Count Polluting Energy Sources as Renewable.” July 2018 at 2.

I urge a favorable vote on HB0561.

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