

House Environment and Transportation Committee – 2/28/2020

House Bill 1128 – Water Quality Certification Improvement Act

POSITION: OPPOSE

Thank you, Chairman Barve and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee for the opportunity to comment on HB1128.

Safety—for customers, employees, contractors and the public—is Washington Gas’ number one priority, and we are committed to delivering natural gas safely and reliably each and every day. We are also committed to sustainability.

Through STRIDE, we are authorized to accelerate replacement of targeted pipes for safety and environmental reasons reducing emissions throughout Maryland. As of 2018, Washington Gas has replaced 21,657 miles of mains and services and will have reduced state GHG emissions by 32,000 metric tons as a result of these infrastructure enhancements.

HB1128 would prevent and limit critical work on pipelines—both new and existing. By imposing additional procedures and requirements for Clean Water Act Section 401 reviews, the bill goes too far with respect to the state’s limited role in evaluating the potential impact of a proposed project on water quality standards. As we’ve seen with NEPA lately, these types of informational bills have provided an inroad for groups to hold up projects for failing to consider, quite frankly, fringe scenarios.

Generally, local distribution companies like Washington Gas don’t require Water Quality Certifications because of the smaller scope of our projects. We also work very hard to avoid impacting waterways and if we need to cross a waterway, we’ll typically drill under it so there is no conflict. In recent history, we’ve only needed a WQC for the Prince George’s County and District of Columbia Reliability and Reinforcement Project.

Lastly, gas pipelines do not present a legitimate threat to waterbody pollution. If there is a gas leak, it simply bubbles up and out of the water. If a bill like this were to pass, we could envision having to continuously demonstrate that pipelines don’t contaminate water, and the process would lead to a host of other questions meant to slow the progress of critical infrastructure projects.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask for an unfavorable report on HB1128. Thank you and please don’t hesitate to reach out with specific questions.

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