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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

January 29, 2021

Chairman Dereck E. Davis
House Economic Matters Committee
House Office Building, Room 231
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB0556 – FAVORABLE – Public Service Commission – Virtual Public Hearings

Dear Chairman Davis and Committee Members:

The Maryland Public Service Commission supports House Bill 556, which is an emergency bill clarifying that the Commission may hold *virtual* public hearings in rate cases certificates of public convenience and necessity cases. While the *Public Utility Article* does not explicitly state that these hearings must take place in person, the Commission's practice prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was to hold in-person hearings. In addition, the *PUA* refers to physical locations and signage requirements.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has transitioned to a fully virtual environment that ensures efficient regulatory proceedings, as well as full transparency and accountability to the public. This includes virtual public comment hearings, as authorized under Executive Orders related to the COVID-19 State of Emergency. All Commission hearings, including public comment hearings, are streamed live on YouTube and archived for later viewing. The online streaming function provides access to more members of the public than an in-person hearing at a physical location such as a school auditorium or conference center, which are not always equipped to record and stream video.

Commission Notices regarding public comment hearings are posted prominently on our website and provide details regarding how to participate. Furthermore, the Commission sends a press release to a media distribution list for each public comment hearing and shares these press releases with the State Delegates and Senators who represent the jurisdictions affected by the rate case or CPCN, as well as officials of the affected county and/or municipality. In addition, the Commission directs CPCN applicants and utilities seeking rate increases to publish information about the public hearing in a newspaper and on the internet.

HB 556 includes enhanced notice provisions. Under this legislation, the Commission must provide notice for rate case hearings and must prominently display the virtual CPCN public comment hearing information on its website, providing the public with opportunity for comment and participation that is comparable to other types of hearings.

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Thank you for your consideration of the Commission's testimony. We urge a favorable report on HB 556. Please contact the Commission's Director of Legislative Affairs, Lisa Smith, at (410) 336-6288 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jason M. Stanek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jason M. Stanek
Chairman