



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

**Testimony on HB 298
Utility Regulation – Consideration of Climate and Labor**

Hearing Date: January 21, 2021

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian

Committee: Economics Matters Committee

Submitting: Ruth White for Howard County Climate Action

Position: Favorable

[HoCo Climate Action](#) -- a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing more than 1,450 subscribers, a member of the Maryland Climate Coalition and the Howard County Climate Collaboration -- supports HB 298, Utility Regulation – Consideration of Climate and Labor.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we have less than 10 years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 60% to avoid the worst impacts of a rapidly warming planet. That means we must transform our households and our entire economy to use clean sources of energy instead of fossil fuels. The Public Service Commission (PSC) makes key decisions that affect energy choices in Maryland. But while other parts of the Maryland government, under legislative mandate, make plans for massive reductions in the use of fossil fuels in order to meet greenhouse gas emissions targets, the PSC has been approving key energy projects without a mandate to consider the urgency of the climate crisis.

The massive losses we suffer now from the Covid-19 crisis show what happens when a society does not take science seriously. Even as we hope to see these tragic losses of life diminish in the coming year, the climate crisis will continue unabated. The world is already seeing climate refugees, increasing hunger, bizarre weather. We hope to see relief from the raging pandemic. But we do not have a vaccine to stop the flooding of our cities, the substantial loss of land on the Eastern Shore, or the heatwaves. .

Several HoCo Climate Action members attended a PSC hearing in Baltimore and saw community members who had suffered for years from emissions from the finally closed Crane coal plant testify against a gas-fired peaker plant. In denying an appeal of the PSC approval, the agency said that state law doesn't require climate change considerations when reviewing power plant projects.

We need to require all Maryland agencies to consider climate -- including the PSC, which has such a large role in deciding energy sources for our homes and communities. Across the nation, a combination of solar and battery storage has forestalled the building of new gas peaker plants. The Maryland General Assembly has legislated incentives for wind and solar and continues to consider laws that will result in more clean energy. We can't have a PSC working at cross purposes from our lawmakers.

This bill also requires gas and electric companies to make information available to the PSC and the legislature on benefits and wages for construction workers in various trades, providing transparency that workers will appreciate.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation in order to enlist the PSC more prominently in making Maryland a leader in considering and taking action on the climate and for labor.

HoCo Climate Action

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Submitted by Ruth White, Steering and Advocacy Committee, Columbia MD

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