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Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB613 – “Prince George’s County – Coal- and Gas-Fired Generating Stations Prohibitions (Prince George’s County Stop Environmentally Unjust Coal and Gas Plants Act of 2021) PG 410-21”
Position: Support with Amendments
Hearing Date: February 25, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report with amendments for HB613. We strongly support a rapid, just transition to clean energy and thank the Prince George’s County Delegation for putting this bill forward.

Section 1 of the bill would advance the causes of clean energy and environmental justice by prohibiting the construction of any additional coal or gas plants in Prince George’s County. With the effects of climate change increasingly apparent, and pollution-related racial health disparities laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that Maryland needs more solar panels and wind turbines, not more fossil fuel power plants. Infrastructure built now will determine how electricity is generated for decades. In southern Prince George’s County, industrial zoning has given rise to a cluster of fossil fuel power plants, as well as a coal ash landfill and a superfund site. These facilities already have severely overburdened and harmed county residents with air and water pollution, exacerbating the effects of historic and ongoing systemic racism. All Marylanders use electricity but Prince George’s residents are disproportionately required to bear the negative pollution effects. This bill would ensure that these burdens are not increased by precluding even more fossil fuel plants from being added to the county.

Section 2 of the bill would mandate the immediate closure of the one coal plant and several gas plants in the county. It is important to note that the one coal plant – Chalk Point – already is set to be deactivated on June 1 of this year. Furthermore, legislation currently pending before this Committee – HB66, the Coal Community Transition Act of 2021, introduced by Vice-Chairman Brooks – recognizes this deactivation date and would ensure that it is met, and also importantly would establish a robust transition plan for the workers and communities impacted by this closure (and by other coal plant closures).

With regard to the County’s gas plants, we agree that deactivation is the goal, however, this would need to occur over a multi-year period to allow for the establishment of new clean energy facilities to replace the electricity provided by these plants, and to address the needs of the affected workers and communities. We support amending the bill to reflect these issues.

For these reasons, we urge that HB613 be reported favorably with amendments.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.