

Re: Support of Senate Bill 315/House Bill 561 (Community Choice Energy)

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 315/House Bill 561 (Community Choice Energy). My name is Joseph Jakuta and I live in Mount Rainier, MD in District 47A. I am writing as a ratepayer, and a father of two young children. It is in the personal financial benefit of ratepayers and the long-term interest of dealing with the climate emergency for this legislation to pass.

I am thankful that you are a co-sponsor of this legislation and am writing you to reach out to your colleagues that have yet to voice support to do so.

Community Choice Energy (CCE) is a policy that will give power back to the people by allowing Maryland communities to establish energy aggregation programs like those already successfully operating around the country. Right now, only the state can directly negotiate with utilities, but the CCE bill allows democratically elected local governments to take decisions about energy into their own hands, driving down rates for consumers and enabling investment in clean, renewable energy programs.

The way the system is currently set up is that default situation for ratepayers in Mount Rainier, like myself, is for PEPCO to choose the energy provider. They are not choosing based on the interests of the community or the ratepayer, but on what goes to benefit PEPCO's bottom line. Of course, ratepayers, since Maryland utilities are deregulated, can switch energy providers, but this requires a good bit of research that most consumers don't have the time in depth knowledge to navigate, or it requires taking faith that a direct mail letter or a door knocker has your best interest at heart.

I wish that all my family, friends, and neighbors, had the time to choose the best provider but let's be realistic, most of us are wrapped around the axle trying to pay bills and take care of the kids. The fact is we don't have the time to make wise decisions on energy providers and CCE will help.

I also will attest from reading the Mount Rainier list-serve that depending on door knockers to find a good energy provider is not the way either. Half of them are just scams with variable rates and hidden clauses and the ones that aren't are being sold by college kids that are just eking out a living trying to get you to switch providers. This is another reason why we need programs like CCE to help.

With Community Choice Energy it is now our local elected officials that make the call for the default. My family could now count on Mayor Malinda Miles and the Mount Rainier City Council to pick a good default energy provider. I am not closer to any elected officials than them and the city staff that support them have already made good decisions picking an energy provider for municipal services that saves the city money. CCE gives them that ability and would certainly benefit Mount Rainier and other communities.

Community Choice Energy also allows communities to follow their values. Communities that place an importance on facing the climate emergency can make a choice that reflects their values. They can choose a provider that provides only clean energy. They can choose a provider that gets the lowest rates. They can choose a provider that gets most of its energy from a local power plant that gives them their jobs, if such a provider is available. It would be their choice.

While I have been focusing on myself as a ratepayer, having volunteered for Mount Rainier I know there are other benefits. Mount Rainier, like many other municipalities in Maryland has signed the “We Are Still In” Paris Climate pledge.¹ While the City of Mount Rainier has done much with its municipal operations to reduce its carbon footprint, and continues to work hard to do more, there is only so much that can be done without the residents and businesses of Mount Rainier all supporting clean energy too. CCE would allow a community that is attempting to meet climate goals to default residents into a clean energy option rather than push for expensive campaigns to get residents to switch and maintain a clean energy provider. And given Mount Rainier’s experience with municipal power choice, this will likely save residents and businesses money too.

Community Choice Energy is about giving people power over their power. It is about making communities decision makers. And it is about saving ratepayers and voters in their pocket book.

I urge you to reach out to your colleagues that do not yet support Senate Bill 315/ House Bill 561 and urge them to support it too. Thanks again for supporting this innovative and important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Joseph Jakuta".

Joseph Jakuta
Mount Rainier, MD

¹ <https://www.wearestillin.com/>