

February 7, 2023

Public Service Commission

1325 G St NW DC #800

Washington, DC 20005



Dear Chairman Thompson, Commissioner Beverly and Commissioner Trabue,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jamoni Overby, and I am the District of Columbia Conservation Advocate for Nature Forward (formerly known as Audubon Naturalist Society). For 125 years, Nature Forward has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. Our Conservation priorities are human health & access to nature; biodiversity & habitat; fighting the climate crisis; and sustainable land use. The urgency of the climate crisis is evident across our country today, and that urgency underscores the importance of hearings like the one we are gathered for here today.

Washington Gas wants to charge DC residents for false solutions that keep DC locked into fossil fuels. Washington Gas is seeking what it calls a "Climate Action Recovery Tariff" (CART), which would charge DC residents millions of dollars for continued reliance on methane gas instead of clean energy. The CART would pay for mixing fracked gas with a small amount of hydrogen and gas from sources like landfills and animal manure from factory farms. Burning methane gas - whether fracked or not- emits pollutants linked to heightened respiratory symptoms, asthma attacks, and hospital admissions. Children living in households with gas appliances are 42% more likely to have asthma. Burning methane gas - whether fracked or not - releases carbon dioxide and contributes to climate change. When methane leaks directly into the atmosphere from pipeline leaks, it is more than 80 times more powerful as a global warming agent than carbon dioxide.

Figures:

- According to a study by the industry-funded American Gas Foundation, if production of manure gas and other fossil gas alternatives were fully ramped up, it could supply only 6% to 13% of current gas demand.
- A report by the California Energy Commission found that "even under optimistic cost assumptions, the blended costs of hydrogen and synthetic natural gas are found to be 8 to 17 times more expensive than the expected price trajectory of natural gas."

- The California Energy Commission also reports that hydrogen can only be injected into existing gas pipelines at minimal volumes before risking dangerous levels of corrosion. Optimistic estimates are that gas pipelines could handle volumes of no more than 7% hydrogen.

Gas from animal manure, landfills, and hydrogen is not a realistic solution to climate pollution from gas utilities. It's greenwashing designed to keep us hooked on fossil fuels and pad utility company profits while doing nothing about climate pollution. The proposed rate increase is simply funding Washington Gas's plan to charge DC residents money for unhealthy energy infrastructure. Washington Gas is seeking approval to charge DC residents \$672 million dollars from 2024 to 2028 to replace gas pipes. Averaged across DC's approximately 700,000 residents, the cost is approximately \$1,000 per person. DC residents should not be burdened with the multi-billion dollar cost of funding this infrastructure. Instead, DC should invest in transitioning to clean energy from electricity, which saves money, enhances indoor air quality, improves public health, and reduces climate pollution. Mayor Bowser's Clean Energy DC Plan states that the District will end fossil fuel combustion by 2026, and last year, DC Council codified this climate commitment into law. Along with financial impact, especially low to moderate income families, this proposed rate hike is in direct opposition to the city's renewable energy goals, and supporting this increase will lock us into a legacy of dirty fossil fuels making it impossible to meet the goals of our legislation.

Jamoni Overby

DC Conservation Advocate, Nature Forward