



BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Good afternoon. I'm Jamie Konopacky, Representative for Sustainable Development at the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing.

I am pleased to join religious leaders from congregations and denominations across Maryland who have joined together to support doubling the amount of renewable energy in Maryland to 40% by 2025.

In addition to having scientific, technical, and economic components, emissions reduction and climate change efforts have a deep moral dimension. These moral concerns are understood and felt by individuals and institutions across the faith spectrum. With members in more than 70 communities across Maryland, the Baha'i community cares deeply about increasing the supply of renewable energy in this state.

The proposed measure will promote health, justice, and equity for the citizens of Maryland and better protect the environment. If implemented, a 40% Renewable Portfolio Standard promises to:

- Cut emissions. In addition to reducing CO2 emissions by over 9.7 million metric tons per year, which is the equivalent of taking 2 million passenger vehicles off the road permanently, cutting back on coal power would reduce emission of pollutants including SO2, nitrous oxides, particulate matter, mercury, lead, cadmium, other toxic heavy metals, trace amounts of uranium and carbon monoxide.
- Improve health. More than 85% of Marylanders live in areas that fail to meet the nation's clean air standards and the state has the highest level of ozone pollution on the east coast. Ground level ozone, or smog, can burn lung tissue, exacerbate asthma, and make people more susceptible to chronic respiratory diseases.
- Promote justice and equity. The health burdens of air pollution associated with coal and natural gas power plants disproportionately harm low-income people and people of color.
- Create jobs. Estimates obtained using the Department of Energy's Jobs and Economic Development Indicator show that a total of 18,000 regional jobs in wind would be created. In addition, 1,600 in-state solar jobs would be created annually.

We in the Baha'i community are guided by a firm belief in the unity of humankind. We understand that unity among people cannot be firmly established without justice and equity. The virtues of unity, justice, and equity have profound implications for policy. Within the climate change context, these virtues direct us to adopt policies that will promptly and drastically reduce our emissions and ameliorate the weather and pollution burdens we have unfairly shifted onto the poor, future generations, and the environment. I believe enacting the proposed 40% renewable portfolio standard is one way of honoring our commitment to these fundamental moral virtues.

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The American Baha'i community for the last several years has taken action to reduce its carbon emissions, both nationally and locally. These efforts and others like them help to raise awareness of the climate issue and emphasize the important part that individuals and communities can play in seeking solutions. But such actions alone are not enough. We need strong government policies that will propel us toward a clean energy future. A 40% renewable portfolio standard in Maryland will help in this regard.

As evidenced in the U.S. National Climate Assessment, the impacts of carbon pollution are already being felt across all regions and sectors of the U.S. economy, and the projected impacts from doing nothing about our emissions are severe. Strong state renewable portfolio standards are long overdue. And, in the absence of a more comprehensive national climate policy, ambitious state renewable portfolio standards are an essential step in the right direction.

Although a 40% standard is ambitious, it is not out of reach. Other state targets evidence the feasibility of a 40% standard. Maine has a renewable energy goal of 40% by 2017. Alaska is aiming to achieve 50% renewable energy by 2025, and California's governor recently announced his intention to increase the state's renewable portfolio standard to 50% by 2030. Moreover, the MD Department of the Environment, in its 2013 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act, encouraged the state to adopt the proposed interim standard of 25% by 2020. And, although the Department did not explicitly encourage the proposed final 40% target, it did cite with approval the proposed RPS efforts of several states considering standards significantly higher than 40%.

The climate challenge can only be solved through the steadfast and combined efforts of individuals, communities, and local, state, and federal governments. Increasing the renewable portfolio standard to 40% would demonstrate the people of Maryland's determination to move forward – to ameliorate the burdens of coal power pollution and to start turning the tide on climate change.

With the many symptoms of a changing climate and the many health impacts of carbon pollution quite evident in the State of Maryland, it is prudent to act with great conviction, determination, and haste to reduce emissions in this State. I thank the committee for its efforts to do just that by considering the proposed 40% renewable portfolio standard.