

March 24, 2021

House Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

*In Re: H.B. 201, 134th General Assembly Regular Session, 2021-2022
Testimony from Utility Workers Union of America Local G-555*

Chairman Stephens, Vice-Chairman Stewart, Ranking Member Weinstein and distinguished members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Paul Talboo, I am the Executive Treasurer of the Utility Workers Union Local G-555. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today on H.B. 201, legislation designed to ensure that consumers can continue to enjoy the benefits of affordable energy in Ohio. Local G-555 represents around 1200 workers in the gas utility sector, primarily maintaining gas distribution and infrastructure throughout the state of Ohio.

The members we serve take pride in the work they do, whether it's installing new services or in repairing leaks and maintaining existing service to improve public safety and protect the environment. Our members believe that natural gas can be a clean, affordable energy option for both residential and business customers.

We have become concerned about 'zero-sum' efforts arising around the state designed to completely shut down the natural gas industry in favor of so-called 'electrification.' This blunt approach to managing carbon emission would directly affect our livelihoods and the customers we serve and would have a bearing on the safety and reliability of the energy delivery systems which we maintain.

For this reason, we support H.B. 201 and its goal of ensuring a balanced and uniform approach to decarbonization, and continued use of existing systems, rather than allowing a chaotic replacement of one industry for another to unfold, one municipality at a time.

We see serious issues in undertaking a one-to-one conversion of all gas usages to electric only. Affordability, for one, particularly in neighborhoods with older homes, rental properties and low-income populations. The costs of conversion – while not inconsiderable for any end user – could fall disproportionately on those customers least able to afford the changes, or the resulting energy costs.

Decarbonization solutions should be discussed in a manner which does not lead to a patchwork of conflicting regulations overlying physically vast, existing gas delivery systems that must, by their very nature, be engineered and maintained consistently across political lines.

While we support de-carbonization, we do not support bans on natural gas at any level. We see electrification as being far more costly and orders of magnitude more physically difficult than simply modernizing gas end-users. Strategies such as reducing building-related emissions

through fixing gas leaks, replacing older gas appliances with state-of-the-art efficient gas appliances using electronic ignitions, and blending hydrogen in delivered gas fuels are examples of policy approaches that would be more effective, cost-efficient and, perhaps most importantly, realistically achievable as opposed to a full replacement of the gas industry and complete retrofit of every building in the state of Ohio, one random locality at a time.

An obvious example as to why this is so, is to simply think through the issues associated with the physical retrofit of homes with existing gas appliances to all electric appliances. In most cases they cannot simply be swapped out in a literal one-to-one exchange. The need to upgrade electrical panels, redo ductwork and wiring, open walls and ceilings, and remodel entire building configurations to accommodate the systems needed would be extremely expensive for all homeowners, regardless of income as well as massively, and physically, disruptive. Add in the complexity of such change being undertaken by a random sampling of Ohio towns and counties acting independently without deep expertise or system-wide planning and you have a recipe for local energy systems collapse.

We believe the most responsible – and achievable – approach to decarbonization is to simply optimize the use of existing natural gas systems, not to eliminate it or, worse, cut it into a number of isolated pieces based solely on local politics rather than sound engineering principles.

Responsible public policy should direct us to integrate and optimize these systems to support our lives as we reduce our state's carbon footprint.

Sincerely,

Paul Talboo
Executive Treasurer
Utility Workers Union of America Local G-555