



Ohio Environmental Council
[Action Fund]

December 13, 2023

To: Members of the Ohio Senate
From: Pete Bucher, Chief of Staff, OEC Action Fund
Re: House Bill 201

Dear Honorable Senators,

I am writing to inform you that the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund will be scoring House Bill 201 for the purposes of our Legislative Scorecard for the 135th Ohio General Assembly. We urge a **NO vote on HB 201**. To the extent that HB 201 passes, the OEC Action Fund will be doing extensive public education on the content and the votes on this legislation due to its negative impact to Ohio's environment, the health of Ohioans, and **Ohio's already rising energy costs and energy burden**.

This legislation features a last minute amendment in a Senate committee that expands current law and allows natural gas utilities to charge customers for additional infrastructure upgrades and expansion tied to economic development projects.

HB 201 will raise Ohioans' rates to pay for infrastructure at private sites, with overly broad language that does not provide proper oversight or timeline for approval from the Public Utilities Commission (PUCO). The OEC Action Fund will be doing extensive public education about how support for HB 201 will directly raise Ohioans' utility bills in favor of private companies.

The authorized rate increase in this bill comes on the heels of the PUCO's approval of a massive rate hike for Columbia Gas earlier this year to fund infrastructure investments. The PUCO-approved fixed charge in that case will raise customer's monthly costs, before ever using any gas at all, to as much as \$58 a month by 2027. It is unacceptable to dump additional costs onto customers in this last-minute money grab for natural gas companies already benefiting from favorable infrastructure investment approvals at the PUCO.

In addition to the language in the bill, the process tied to its amendment is part of a continued trend of last minute amendments in favor of the natural gas industry and investor-owned utilities with little to no opportunity for public input.

The state of Ohio cannot have equitable energy and environmental policy with a process that pushes through last minute giveaways to the natural gas industry at the expense of hardworking Ohioans struggling to pay their energy bills. If Ohio's leaders would like to explore changes to economic development infrastructure incentives, they should do so through an open and transparent process, in a standalone bill. This continuing trend of last minute amendments tacked on to bills that are over halfway through the legislative process flies in the



face of the democratic process, and does not allow Ohioans to meaningfully participate in the development of legislation

For these reasons, the OEC Action Fund urges members of the Ohio Senate to vote NO on HB 201.

If you have any questions, please contact me at pbucher@theoec.org.

Sincerely,

Pete Bucher
Chief of Staff
OEC Action Fund