

**CITY OF BOZEMAN TESTIMONY**  
**Energy, Technology, and Federal Relations Committee**  
**03-20-2023**

Good Afternoon, Chair Zolnikov and Members of the Committee, my name is Natalie Meyer (M-E-Y-E-R), I am the Sustainability Manager for the City of Bozeman. Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in OPPOSITION to SB 208 on behalf of the City of Bozeman.

The City of Bozeman adopted an ambitious Climate Plan in 2020, but this detailed plan does not call for a ban on natural gas or any fuel source. This attempt to get ahead of the curve is a solution in search of a problem. In fact, we believe the bill creates problems in regulating basic infrastructure for safety rather than solving a problem.

We will never forget March of 2009 when Bozeman suffered a natural gas explosion. Our community lost four downtown buildings, a woman tragically lost her life, and the resulting fire burned for more than a day. The fire threatened nearby buildings as utility workers tried to shut down gas lines. If not for the exceptional local emergency response, the damage to the heart of Bozeman could have been much worse. However, it still took years for downtown to rebuild and recover.

This experience, and the health and safety risks of combustion fuels, has NOT led the City of Bozeman to pursue a natural gas ban, but it does demonstrate that the connection and reconnection of service lines is fundamentally a local issue.

To that end, we are concerned about general words such as “impede” in relation to the connection or reconnection of service, or “has the effect of prohibiting or impeding” connection or reconnection in the bill. Would a safety inspection constitute an “impediment”?

The utility service provider’s responsibility stops at the meter. The local jurisdiction is then responsible for the building side of the house. Local building officials perform those inspections to verify the utility has been installed meeting the minimum standards of the applicable code. Sometimes the utility installs and turns on the service before our inspectors can test the system. Our inspectors then have to ask them to turn off service temporarily until inspection and testing can be completed. Without testing gas piping in a building to ensure there are no leaks, we run the risk of making people sick or an explosion.

Further, this bill seems to prevent local jurisdictions from managing a critical business and life safety relationship with a monopoly utility. Local jurisdictions have natural gas franchise agreements with utilities. These are special privileges awarded by the government to a person or corporation and convey a valuable property right. If a utility should fail to demonstrate its ability to protect public health and safety under a franchise agreement, local governments shouldn’t be stripped of a remedy. Does this bill amount to an irrevocable grant of special privileges and immunities for utilities?

In the absence of a robust policy conversation, this appears to be a bill that favors the interests of utilities over those of local government and communities.

Thank you Chair Zolnikov and members of the Energy, Technology, and Federal Relations Committee for hearing my testimony opposing Senate Bill 208. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.