

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill (SB) 0699: Forest Conservation Act - Linear Projects -  
Alteration by Dr. William Reid  
Education, Energy, and the Environment  
Position: Support  
February 25, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee. My name is Dr. William Reid, and I am a resident of Frederick, Maryland. I serve as an Executive Board Member of the Rural Maryland Council, a leader with Progressive Maryland, and Chair of Frederick Progressives. Today, I write to support Senate Bill 699, which will close a loophole in the Forest Conservation Act and ensure that energy companies take responsibility for the forests they destroy.

Maryland's Forest Conservation Act requires developers to reforest land when clearing 40,000 square feet or more. Agricultural and resource areas must restore forest cover to 20%, while high-density and commercial areas must meet a 15% threshold. However, linear projects, such as distribution and transmission lines, are exempt from these rules. Currently, energy companies can clear forest areas for distribution and transmission lines without replanting a single tree. Senate Bill 699 will fix this by removing transmission and distribution lines from the "linear project" exemption if constructed after October 1, 2025. This change will hold electric companies accountable and ensure they either reforest the land they clear or contribute to reforestation efforts.

The consequences of unchecked deforestation are severe—loss of biodiversity, increased carbon emissions, and damage to ecosystems that protect our air and water. This bill is a commonsense step toward protecting Maryland's forests and holding energy companies accountable. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 699. Let's protect our natural resources and ensure a sustainable future for Maryland.