

February 21, 2025

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I am writing in strong support of SB0699, a necessary amendment to the Forest Conservation Act that will finally hold transmission developers accountable for the environmental destruction they leave in their wake. This bill would close a dangerous loophole that has allowed utilities and transmission companies to carve through Maryland's forests with little oversight, treating vital ecosystems as expendable in the name of corporate convenience. By ensuring that new transmission lines constructed after October 1, 2025, are no longer exempt from forest conservation requirements, SB0699 restores a level of responsibility and oversight that has long been lacking in our energy planning process.

Growing up, I was deeply involved in the Future Farmers of America Conservation Club. Through that experience, I learned not just the science of environmental stewardship but the personal responsibility we all share in preserving the land for future generations. We spent time planting trees, restoring habitats, and learning about the delicate balance between human development and the natural world. These formative experiences shaped my values, and they are lessons I want to pass down to my own child. I want them to experience the same sense of wonder and connection to the land that I did, not to grow up watching forests clear-cut for transmission lines that may not even be necessary.

Now, as an educator, I teach outdoor education in the Hereford Zone, in addition to snow days, we are also known for its pastoral landscapes, forests, Gunpowder falls, and our commitment to conservation. It is also an area that PSEG intends to carve apart if they have their way. Every year, I take students outside to learn about their environment, not from a textbook, but by experiencing it firsthand. They explore the delicate ecosystems of the Gunpowder Watershed, observe the biodiversity that thrives in our forests, and gain a deep appreciation for the natural resources that sustain us. These experiences matter. They inspire stewardship, curiosity, and a sense of place. Yet, if projects like MPRP are allowed to proceed unchecked, much of what makes this region special could be lost. It is hard to teach students to care for something that has already been destroyed.

My dedication to conservation goes beyond education. I have received grant funding for conservation efforts on Baltimore County Public Schools property, funding that has been used to restore native habitats, prevent erosion, and create outdoor learning environments for students. This investment of time, effort, and resources was meant to protect and enhance Maryland's natural spaces, not to see them squandered by transmission companies looking for the path of least resistance. If PSEG is allowed to move forward

unchecked, these efforts will be undone, and the forests I have worked to restore will be lost beneath steel towers and power lines.

MPRP represents a direct threat to the forests, farmland, and natural heritage of Maryland's Piedmont region. If allowed to proceed under current rules, thousands of acres could be lost with minimal oversight. The justification for the project has already been called into question, as PSEG failed to properly evaluate whether existing infrastructure could be upgraded before pushing forward with new transmission lines. When pressed, company representatives admitted they had not explored alternatives until public outcry forced them to. This lack of accountability is precisely why SB0699 is necessary; without it, utilities and developers will continue to take the easiest path forward, even if it means cutting through protected habitats, family farms, and century-old woodlands.

I am particularly concerned about the impact on federally protected bald eagle populations in our region. The Maryland Piedmont region is home to critical nesting sites for bald eagles, which require undisturbed forests near water sources to thrive. High-voltage transmission lines and their construction threaten these habitats, increasing the likelihood of eagle fatalities due to habitat destruction, displacement, and electrocution risks. For a species that symbolizes our nation's resilience and strength, allowing unchecked development to threaten its survival is not only irresponsible but deeply unpatriotic.

SB0699 does not ban transmission expansion; rather, it ensures that any project must meet the same forest conservation requirements as other forms of development. This is a simple, common-sense measure that places the burden where it belongs—on the developers seeking to alter our landscapes, not on the communities trying to protect them. If this bill is passed, utilities will no longer receive automatic exemptions from conservation regulations, forcing them to take responsibility for the land they disrupt. It will also increase reforestation requirements, ensuring that when forests are cleared for infrastructure projects, meaningful efforts are made to restore the environmental balance.

This bill is not just about stopping MPRP; it is about setting a precedent for responsible infrastructure development moving forward. Rather than blindly approving transmission expansion, Maryland should prioritize upgrading existing grid infrastructure, siting new transmission along highways and rail lines rather than through forests, and investing in localized energy solutions that reduce reliance on long-distance transmission. Our future energy needs must be met without sacrificing the very landscapes that make Maryland unique.

There is a path forward that balances energy reliability with environmental stewardship, but that path requires oversight, accountability, and a commitment to better solutions. By passing SB0669, Maryland can send a clear message: our forests, wildlife, and rural communities are not collateral damage in the rush to expand infrastructure. I urge you to support this bill and ensure that the energy solutions of the future do not come at the expense of our most precious natural resources.

Thank you,

Bryan Price