

LPT Testimony - SB 699.pdf

Uploaded by: Ann Jones

Position: FAV



LPT LAND PRESERVATION TRUST

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**Testimony – SB 699 – Forest Conservation Act – Linear Projects – Alterations
Hearing – Education, Energy and the Environment
February 25, 2025**

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, and Distinguished Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Vicky Collins and I live in North Baltimore County and serve as the President and Board Chair of the Land Preservation Trust, Inc, a 501c 3 which conserved land in partnership with the County, State, and individuals. We have 380 easements representing over 14,000 acres and manage an area of 53,000 acres for the Rural Legacy program – half of which is in perpetual conservation easement with the State, the County or with individuals. I am concerned about the threat of transmission projects crossing much of the conserved land in Baltimore County. Specifically, we hold an easement which is also protected by a forest conservation easement and which is directly threatened by a new transmission project.

The essence of this bill is to remove electric transmission lines from permissible project within a forest conservation easement. As everyone is aware, the rural, forested and conserved areas in three Maryland Counties are threatened by construction of a new transmission line, known as the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project. The company developing the line, Public Service Enterprise Group and the regional transmission authority, PJM, each admit to targeting rural farmland and conserved areas as the best option for constructing new transmission lines.

Through Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties, the preferred lines as well as the alternate pathways all cross significant amounts of conserved farmland, open space, and forest conservation areas. Removing the possibility to construct overhead transmission lines through forest conservation would simply affirm the reasons for the conservation. A 150 wide swath of deforested land within an existing conservation zone makes little sense as it would impact not only that lost space, but would compromise the health of the surrounding forest. Forests are healthy when they are continuous and not interrupted by swaths of light created by an opened right of way. In addition to the project itself, access roads required to develop and maintain a transmission line create further harmful disturbance.

While the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project may be the inspiration behind such a bill, the project has in many ways, elevated the discussion of how much Maryland and its precious resources must be sacrificed for this and future projects designed to primarily benefit neighboring States.

Thank you for a favorable decision.

Victoria C Collins
2050 Geist Road
Reisterstown, MD 21136

Testimony in Support of SB0699.pdf

Uploaded by: Brenda Myers

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of SB 0699

SB 0699 proposes a critical amendment to the Forest Conservation Act by removing automatic exemptions for new transmission and distribution lines constructed on or after October 1, 2025. This change closes a major loophole that has allowed widespread deforestation with minimal oversight, directly impacting projects like the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP).

By ensuring new transmission projects comply with forest conservation requirements, SB 0699 will:

- **Eliminate exemptions** that currently allow transmission lines to bypass conservation laws.
- **Strengthen afforestation obligations**, requiring more tree planting when forests are cleared.
- **Hold utilities accountable**, preventing unchecked infrastructure expansion through rural Maryland.

MPRP alone threatens thousands of acres of farmland, forests, and private property. If passed, SB 0699 would:

- Increase regulatory scrutiny, potentially halting MPRP before it gains traction.
- Prevent utilities from fast-tracking harmful projects under outdated rules.
- Ensure greater environmental accountability for energy developers.

This bill is part of a larger push to rethink Maryland's energy strategy. Instead of prioritizing unnecessary transmission expansion, the state should focus on:

- Upgrading existing grid infrastructure for efficiency.
- Routing new transmission along transportation corridors.
- Investing in localized, distributed energy solutions.

SB 0699 is essential to protecting Maryland's landscapes and communities from reckless infrastructure projects. I urge your support to pass this bill and promote a more sustainable, responsible energy future. Maryland can lead the way, will we?

Regards,

Brenda Myers

SB0699 Price 221.pdf

Uploaded by: Brysn Price

Position: FAV

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

FAV_SB0699_StopMPRPInc.pdf

Uploaded by: Joanne Frederick

Position: FAV



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: Senate Bill 699 – Forest Conservation Act – Linear Projects – Alteration

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters and Environment and Transportation

HEARING DATE: February 25, 2025

SPONSOR: Senator Ready

POSITION: Favorable

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 699, which strengthens Maryland’s commitment to forest conservation by excluding new transmission and distribution lines from the definition of a “linear project” under the Forest Conservation Act. This legislation is critical for ensuring that electric utilities do not exploit regulatory loopholes to clear-cut forests and degrade Maryland’s rural landscapes under the guise of infrastructure expansion.

The Environmental and Economic Imperative for SB0699

Forests and Stream Buffers: Critical to Maryland’s Waterways and the Chesapeake Bay

Maryland’s forested lands and riparian buffers play an essential role in protecting water quality by filtering pollutants, stabilizing streambanks, and reducing sediment runoff into our waterways. According to environmental impact assessments of infrastructure projects like the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP), over **101 streams and water bodies** are at risk of increased erosion and contamination due to land clearing for new transmission lines.

The loss of **over 394 acres of forest** under projects like the MPRP would further strain an already stressed Chesapeake Bay watershed, increasing sedimentation, harming aquatic life, and exacerbating flooding concerns. The mitigation of these environmental impacts is neither guaranteed nor immediate—once forests are cut, ecosystems take decades to recover. SB0699 provides essential protections to prevent unnecessary deforestation and to safeguard Maryland’s water quality for generations to come.



The Devastating Impact of Infrastructure Expansion on Rural Maryland

The construction of 303 access roads for MPRP—each between 16 and 25 feet wide—would lead to **140 acres of permanent land destruction**, fragmenting ecosystems and paving over prime farmland. Such land loss disrupts the delicate balance of rural life, threatening both the economic viability of farms and the scenic beauty that attracts residents and visitors to Maryland's countryside.

Rural Maryland is not just an area of natural beauty; it is a key driver of our state's economy. Agricultural lands support thousands of jobs and contribute to food security. However, soil erosion, runoff pollution, and habitat destruction caused by large-scale infrastructure projects degrade farmland, rendering it less productive and economically unsustainable in the long run.

Keeping Maryland Attractive: Strengthening the Tax Base Through Sustainable Development

One of Maryland's most significant economic advantages is its rural beauty. Residents choose to live in these areas for their open spaces, clean air, and connection to nature. However, the encroachment of industrial infrastructure, such as high-voltage transmission lines and associated deforestation, threatens property values, deters new homebuyers, and reduces the tax base.

The expansion of transmission infrastructure does not just impact those directly affected—it decreases the overall attractiveness of Maryland's rural areas, leading to slowed economic growth and decreased local tax revenues.

By passing SB0699, Maryland can take a firm stand in favor of responsible infrastructure planning—ensuring that conservation efforts align with economic growth while maintaining the rural charm that makes our state a desirable place to live, work, and invest.



Conclusion

Senate Bill 699 is a necessary safeguard against the unchecked destruction of Maryland's forests, farmlands, and waterways under the pretext of transmission infrastructure expansion. By amending the Forest Conservation Act to prevent transmission and distribution projects from bypassing conservation requirements, this bill upholds Maryland's commitment to sustainable development while protecting our natural resources and the economic vitality of our rural communities.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB0699.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Frederick

President

Stop MPRP, Inc.

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SB699ForestConservationAct.pdf

Uploaded by: Justin Ready

Position: FAV

JUSTIN READY
Legislative District 5
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MINORITY WHIP
Finance Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2025

SB 699 – Forest Conservation Act – Linear Projects – Alteration

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Senate Bill 669 alters the definition of “linear project” under the Forest Conservation Act to exclude a project for a new transmission line or new distribution line constructed on or after a certain date. Linear projects are construction or reconstruction of roads, trails, sidewalks, rail lines, etc.

Under the Forest Conservation Act, any public or private subdivision plan or application for a grading control permit by any person, including a unit of State or local government on areas 40,000 square feet or greater is required to afforest (tree planting) the land that was graded. For agricultural/resource areas, if the land has less than 20% forest cover, it must be afforested until the forest cover reaches 20% again. Additionally, if the forest cover is less than 15%, afforestation is required until the forest cover reaches 15% again. However, linear projects are excluded from the afforestation provision.

As the MPRP projects stands, a rough estimate provided by a constituent showed that over 6,000 acres of forest covered land will be cut down. This bill seeks to hold utility companies who deforest tens of thousands of acres of forest land.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 699.

HB1224-SB0699 - FAVORABLE testimony - MPatton.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Patton

Position: FAV

Mary Patton
5772 Catocin Vista Dr
Mount Airy, MD
February 21, 2025

Re: Testimony for HB1224/SB0699 – Forest Conservation Act – Linear Projects - Alteration

Dear Senator Ready:

I am writing to express FAVORABLE support for HB1224/SB0699. I am a landscape architect that regularly prepares forest conservation plans to address the requirements of the Forest Conservation Act. When this act was established, the extent to which new transmission lines would be needed to support things such as data centers was not a critical concern. Now, however, with projects such as the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project, the impact of allowing transmission line projects be exempt from the Forest Conservation Act is of great concern.

The Forest Conservation Act needs to be updated to account for today's era where new energy infrastructure is needed, but infrastructure projects need to be thoughtful and carefully designed. We need to ensure developers are not able to take the easy way out to the detriment of our environment and private lands. Instead, by ensuring that transmission line projects need to follow the requirements of the Forest Conservation Act, our limited forest resources will remain protected while ensuring more careful planning and efficient design for any new distribution line projects.

I ask you to support this bill, to no longer justify deforestation for poorly designed infrastructure projects, and instead require infrastructure projects to follow the requirements of the Forest Conservation Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Patton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and last name "Patton" clearly distinguishable.

Mary Patton

support sb0699.pdf

Uploaded by: Matthew Moran

Position: FAV

February 21, 2025

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives,

Please support Senate Bill 0699.

We need to do all that we can to protect Maryland's forests and other natural resources.

Thank you very much,

Matt Moran

2931 Monocacy Bottom Rd.
Adamstown, MD 21710
monocacybottommatt@gmail.com

Senate Bill (SB) 0699- Forest Conservation Act - L

Uploaded by: William Reid

Position: FAV

**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.

BGE_OPP_EEE_Senate Bill 699 - Forest Conservation

Uploaded by: Dytonia Reed

Position: UNF

OPPOSE
Education, Energy and Environment
2/25/2025

Senate Bill 699 - Forest Conservation Act - Linear Projects - Alteration

Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE) opposes *Senate Bill 699*, which updates the definition of "linear project" under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) to exclude new transmission or distribution lines constructed on or after October 1, 2025.

The Maryland Forest Conservation Act (FCA), enacted in 1991, is a crucial piece of legislation aimed at minimizing the loss of Maryland's forest resources during land development. The FCA integrates the identification and protection of forests and other sensitive areas into the site planning process. While the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service administers the FCA, its implementation is carried out at the local level, providing local jurisdictions with maximum flexibility in applying the FCA.

Under the current law, linear projects that do not involve cutting, clearing, or grading more than 20,000 square feet of forest are exempt from the FCA's requirements. Utilities, including water, telecommunication, gas, and electric, often need to clear forestry for various projects multiple times per year, and an exemption was granted for this purpose. However, *Senate Bill 699* changes this by excluding transmission or distribution line construction from the definition of linear projects. This change would make it more difficult for these projects to proceed due to increased local permitting requirements.

BGE cautions against making changes that would create significant barriers to ongoing transmission projects, which are essential for addressing resource adequacy challenges in the region. If passed, the bill would jeopardize critical projects like the Brandon Shores Remediation Transmission line. This PJM-directed project is necessitated by the closure of the Brandon Shore generating plant, which will take 1300MW of capacity offline upon retirement. Projects like Brandon Shores are essential to maintaining reliable electric delivery to central Maryland.

BGE strongly emphasizes that this legislation would significantly complicate the construction and enhancement of infrastructure, especially during a period of growing imbalance between electricity supply and demand. This imbalance is driven by increased electrification, the online.

For these reasons, BGE strongly requests an unfavorable Committee report on *Senate Bill 699*.

Senate Bill 699 UNF– Forest Conservation Act - Lin

Uploaded by: Poetri Deal

Position: UNF

February 25, 2025

112 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Opposition– Senate Bill 699– Forest Conservation Act - Linear Projects – Alteration

Potomac Electric Power Company (Pepco) and Delmarva Power & Light Company (Delmarva Power) submit this letter of opposition on **Senate Bill 699– Forest Conservation Act - Linear Projects – Alteration**. Senate Bill 699 amends the definition of "linear project" under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) to exclude new transmission or distribution lines constructed on or after October 1, 2025. This proposed change would significantly impact the ability to construct and maintain essential electric infrastructure necessary for ensuring reliability and meeting the growing energy demands of Maryland residents and businesses.

The FCA, established in 1991, plays a vital role in balancing land development with forest conservation. It provides a framework for integrating forest preservation into project planning while granting local jurisdictions flexibility in its application. However, Senate Bill 699 would introduce new obstacles for critical transmission and distribution projects, thereby undermining the ability to provide safe and reliable electricity service to Maryland customers. As energy demand continues to rise due to electrification and the transition to cleaner energy sources, it is crucial that utilities maintain the ability to construct and upgrade infrastructure efficiently.

Currently, linear projects that do not involve clearing more than 20,000 square feet of forest are exempt from FCA requirements, allowing utilities, including electric, gas, water, and telecommunications, to undertake necessary projects without undue regulatory burdens. Senate Bill 699 would remove this exemption for electric transmission and distribution projects, creating additional local permitting requirements that could delay or even halt vital system upgrades. The legislation also unfairly singles out electric utilities while exempting other industries, despite the fact that telecommunications and other infrastructure projects have similar environmental impacts. This inequitable approach places an unnecessary burden on electric utilities and jeopardizes the timely execution of projects essential for system reliability. For instance, transmission projects required to replace retiring generation facilities are critical to preventing service disruptions and ensuring that Maryland's grid remains resilient.

By imposing additional permitting hurdles, Senate Bill 699 could delay or prevent projects that are integral to meeting Maryland's clean energy and electrification goals. It is imperative that electric utilities retain the ability to efficiently build and maintain the infrastructure needed to support economic growth and environmental sustainability. For these reasons, Pepco and Delmarva Power respectfully request an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 699.

Valencia McClure | Anne Klase | Allyson Black-Woodson | Poetri Deal | 410 980 5347

Exelon (Nasdaq: EXC) is a Fortune 200 company and the nation's largest utility company, serving more than 10.5 million customers through six fully regulated transmission and distribution utilities — Atlantic City Electric, BGE, ComEd, Delmarva Power, PECO, and Pepco. Exelon's 20,000 employees dedicate their time and expertise to supporting our communities through reliable, affordable and efficient energy delivery, workforce development, equity, economic development and volunteerism.