



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 525

Public Utilities – Energy Distribution Planning and Required Labor Standards

Date: February 15, 2022
To: Finance Committee

Position: **Support**
From: Josh Kurtz, MD Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 525, which builds on the Public Service Commission's Distribution System Planning process by providing valuable guidelines to meet greenhouse gas reduction goals, planning for increased renewable energy distribution, supporting inclusive stakeholder engagement, and directing federal infrastructure funding to support this important work.

This bill requires the planning needed to overcome grid capacity issues and advance clean energy projects.

CBF's Clagett farm, a 285-acre vegetable and livestock operation in Upper Marlboro, has been working to develop a solar array to pioneer compatible grazing practices. CBF has been working with farmers for over 40 years to demonstrate the efficacy of innovative practices for regenerative agriculture. One area where there is growing interest is the implementation of small-scale solar facilities that can be enrolled in community solar programs or sold to utilities that fit within normal farm operations. At CBF, we identified multiple marginal pasture areas where we graze sheep that could be compatible with solar panels. We worked with a developer to implement the project, but we have been stymied due to grid congestion. We have heard from other farmers that this is hurdle that have impacted their ability to participate in renewable energy deployment and the associated mitigation of greenhouse gases. A proactive planning process will help to identify and eventually alleviate congestion areas where there is high demand for deployment.

Considerable work has been done around solar siting in Maryland, but grid congestion often remains a hurdle to solar siting.

For the past several years stakeholder groups, legislative work groups and advocacy organizations have hosted symposiums around challenges related to solar siting. There are concerns from advocates around the loss of the green space and productive agricultural areas for solar development when there are thousands of acres of marginalized lands, including 9,500 acres of abandoned mines¹. Many of these conversations led to numerous land classifications that had wide stakeholder support for re-development. HB 88's planning process would require proactive grid planning to access these widely accepted areas for distributed renewable energy without negative impacts to Maryland's natural resources.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 525. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney, at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753

¹ Maryland Department of Environment, [Abandoned Mine Lands and Acid Drainage](#).

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