



Eastern Shore

LAND CONSERVANCY

Committee: House – Economic Matters

Bill: HB1036 – Renewable Energy Certainty Act

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Hearing Date: February 28, 2025

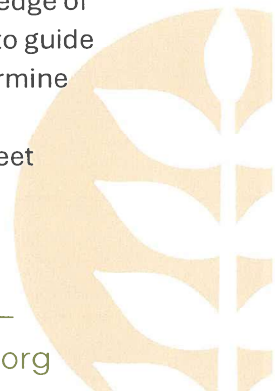
Chair Wilson and Committee Members,

Thank you for considering the testimony of Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) on HB1036, the **Renewable Energy Certainty Act**. We understand the need for consistent and predictable siting standards to expedite renewable energy projects. However, we **oppose HB1036** believing it casts too broad of a net, treating projects that vary considerably in their size and impact the same. HB1036 negates the important role of local government in land-use planning and taxing authority and overlooks meaningful mitigation fees and the role they play in directing solar to the most appropriate places.

It is essential to separate the climate benefits of solar energy from the land-use consequences of large scale solar infrastructure. Right now, prime farmland is the most at risk for conversion to utility scale solar, as developers seek economies of scale on flat, cleared agricultural land. The ongoing land-use conflicts surrounding solar projects in Maryland often overlook a crucial reality: our agricultural industry also relies on economies of scale. Many of you are from districts where once-thriving agricultural economies have eroded over time. But the Eastern Shore of Maryland has held on to this industry.

The Eastern Shore of Maryland, with large tracts of highly productive prime farmland and a circular farm economy, currently provides 74% of the state's agricultural sales. This is the very same land highly sought after by solar investors that can earn a better return on their investment by siting large projects on the regions flat, cleared farmland. The increasingly high rates offered by developers to lease land for solar do not appear to be an impediment to development but they do have implications for farmers who are dependent on leasing acreage to make their enterprises profitable and could have serious consequences for future generations seeking to enter into farming.

A primary reason the Eastern Shore remains an agricultural powerhouse is the protection afforded farmland in rural counties through their Comprehensive Plans and zoning regulations. Leaders in rural counties are often intimately connected to farming and have deep generational knowledge of the land and familiarity with its contributions to the local economy. Removing their ability to guide solar siting decisions risks placing projects in inappropriate locations and will further undermine the statewide, cooperative effort that is needed to transition our energy economy to a more renewable one. It also sets a troublesome precedent as the state actively seeks ways to meet surging energy demand whether it be through solar, nuclear or transmission upgrades.



As the Covid pandemic hopefully taught us, food production is absolutely essential. Accelerating conversion of farmland without regard to the impacts to the wider agricultural sector could push food production to marginal lands that are more susceptible to climate change impacts. Maryland farmers are highly regarded as leaders in the implementation of conservation practices on their lands, providing climate benefits such as carbon sequestration, wildlife habitats, flood mitigation and other ecosystem services in addition to growing food.

We urge you to reject HB1036 in its current form and instead pursue a more balanced, strategic approach – one that acknowledges the vital role of local input in land-use decisions and the importance of maintaining the viability of our agricultural industry. Conservation of precious natural resources like our prime farm soils should be perceived as aligned with state climate goals and treated accordingly.

Respectfully submitted,

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy