

February 28, 2025

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I am writing to urge your strong support for HB0645, a bill that is essential to protecting Maryland landowners, local governments, and communities from unnecessary and disruptive transmission projects. Under current law, utilities and regional transmission organizations have the power to dictate where and how transmission lines are built, often with minimal local input, little regard for property rights, and questionable justifications for expansion. HB0645 changes that by ensuring that new projects are carefully planned, justified, and aligned with the needs of the communities they impact.

Maryland's current energy planning process gives too much power to transmission developers and too little to the communities that bear the burden of these projects. Right now, transmission lines can be routed through private property, farmland, and even residential neighborhoods with minimal accountability and oversight. HB0645 is a commonsense reform that ensures that new transmission projects are justified, necessary, and aligned with local priorities rather than simply rubber-stamped.

The need for HB0645 is best illustrated by what happened with the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project. The politicians of Maryland were completely blindsided by this massive, high-voltage transmission project. Elected officials, including state lawmakers and local county leaders, were given little to no warning about its scope or impact. It was only after residents and community leaders raised the alarm that the full extent of the project became clear. Every county government affected by the project—Baltimore, Harford, and Carroll Counties—has come out in opposition. Yet under current law, their objections carry little weight, and transmission developers are not required to meaningfully engage with local officials before proposing a project of this magnitude. HB0645 corrects this failure by ensuring that counties play a formal role in transmission planning and decision-making.

Local governments should not have to fight after the fact to stop reckless and unnecessary projects. They should be involved from the very beginning, ensuring that new transmission infrastructure aligns with local land-use priorities, protects property values, and is justified by actual demand. HB0645 makes that possible.

This bill provides critical protections for Maryland communities. It gives local governments a greater voice by requiring counties and Baltimore City to include electric system planning in their comprehensive land-use plans. This ensures that municipal and county priorities are considered before a transmission project is approved. Instead of allowing utilities to force projects through with little local input, HB0645 requires the Public Service Commission to weigh local recommendations before granting approval. It prevents

unnecessary land seizures and protects property rights by prioritizing the use of existing infrastructure and transmission corridors over the creation of new ones. Too often, landowners have their property threatened by transmission projects that could have been placed along existing rights-of-way but weren't, simply because it was easier for utilities to take new land than to modernize what they already have. HB0645 makes sure that utilities fully explore and justify all alternative routes before they carve up communities. It holds utilities accountable for their planning and decision-making by requiring them to report annually on their compliance with local electric system planning priorities. Utilities would also have to provide forecasted electricity demand and demonstrate a need for new transmission lines before projects are approved. This ensures that new transmission is built only when it is actually needed, not just because utilities want to expand their footprint or secure higher guaranteed returns on capital investments.

Without HB0645, Maryland will continue to face unchecked transmission expansion that harms property values, farmland, and local economies. I have seen firsthand what happens when a transmission project is allowed to move forward without real justification or oversight. When Delegate Mangione asked PSEG if they had fully explored the possibility of upgrading existing infrastructure rather than building new transmission lines, the company admitted they had not. Only after massive community outcry did they scramble to produce a study justifying their original position. This raises serious questions about the transparency, thoroughness, and sincerity of the process utilities use when making these decisions. HB0645 prevents this from happening again.

Maryland should not allow energy corporations to prioritize expediency over responsible planning, and we should not allow utilities to take private land when better alternatives exist. The passage of HB0645 ensures that transmission planning becomes a structured, transparent process—one where community voices matter, environmental concerns are addressed, and property rights are protected.

Maryland has the opportunity to lead the way in responsible energy planning by ensuring that transmission projects are built only when they are truly needed and only when local governments and communities have had a meaningful say in the process. Passing HB0645 means protecting property rights by stopping unnecessary land seizures. It means preserving farmland and open spaces from industrial encroachment. It ensures that municipalities have a voice in the approval process, preventing transmission developers from overriding local land-use plans. It limits the construction of new overhead transmission lines, ensuring that aesthetic and environmental concerns are taken into account. Finally, it guarantees that transmission projects are built based on actual energy demand forecasts, preventing unnecessary expansion that burdens communities.

For too long, utilities and transmission developers have been given a free pass to disrupt communities without accountability. HB0645 ensures that landowners, local governments, and the public have a seat at the table. We should all be partners in our state's energy future.

I urge the Maryland General Assembly to stand with landowners, municipalities, and responsible energy advocates by voting yes on HB0645.

Thank you,

Bryan Price