

February 18, 2025

Chair Wilson, Economic Matters Committee

230 Taylor House Office Building
231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Testimony in Support of HB HB0640 Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity – Overhead Transmission Lines – Conservation Easements

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee,

I strongly urge you to provide a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 640 Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity – Overhead Transmission Lines – Conservation Easements for the following reasons:

Erosion of Conservation and Agricultural Protections: Designated conservation and agricultural lands should not be taken by Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity without a thorough study of the environmental impacts of the new intended use and consideration of all alternatives. These lands were set up in easements to ensure that future generations can enjoy the benefits of our natural spaces and have land available for agriculture. This is a promise to future generations of Marylanders, a promise that is at risk if we don't study the impacts and consider alternatives first. HB 640 helps ensure we continue to protect our natural resources and reserve land for agriculture.

Environmental Impact: Conservation lands are home to critical ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and rare plant species. Allowing industrial-scale infrastructure like overhead transmission lines will fragment these areas, disrupt ecosystems, and endanger unique native flora and fauna. This means the permanent loss of critical services such as recreational opportunities, mental health promotion through connection with the natural world, and habitat for diverse forest, grassland, and aquatic plant and animal communities. Healthy forests are the backbone of watersheds that absorb stormwater, replenish and purify groundwater, and provide ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, oxygen production, and biodiversity protection. We will lose their protection from the impacts of climate change, a loss we can ill afford as we see continually more damaging weather events, wildfires, and the impact of rising temperatures.

Poor management of our State's natural resources: Taking conservation and agricultural land without studying the environmental impact and considering all alternatives will have devastating consequences for Maryland's natural and agricultural resources and is an example of poor management of our State's natural and agricultural resources. Discarding their protections to accommodate electrical transmission infrastructure is a dangerous precedent for future infrastructure projects targeting conservation and agricultural lands. To think that some of these lands may be taken needlessly without considering other options is heartbreaking, unnecessary, and a poor management of our State's natural resources.

Revenue loss: Our conservation and agricultural lands are a significant source of revenue to the State. Wildlife, for example, are critical to Maryland's tourism industry. Wildlife watching in Maryland generates over \$450 million in economic activity annually in the State each year. This proposal could lead to revenue losses of millions of dollars to local businesses and municipalities.

Alternatives exist: While proponents of taking conservation and agricultural lands by Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity claim this measure is necessary to address electricity reliability issues, better alternatives exist today. There are cleaner, more sustainable ways to address Maryland's energy reliability issues. For instance, distributed energy solutions, burying transmission lines, and optimizing

existing transmission infrastructure are all viable options that do not require sacrificing our protected natural and agricultural resources. Any taking of these lands must be made in fully transparent public discussions with all of the information about the proposed electrical transmission project and the alternative approaches and routes available to the public.

Taking these lands for electrical infrastructure purposes **could** open the floodgates for additional exceptions to easement protections. If we allow these areas to be exploited for energy infrastructure, what's next? Mining? Commercial development?

The natural beauty and agricultural heritage of Maryland is not just a resource; it's part of our identity. These lands deserve to remain protected, untouched by industrial development. Moreover, we cannot allow the chipping away of our protected lands.

HB640 helps to protect the values we hold dear. Let's protect our natural and agricultural resources today and for generations to come.

For the reasons detailed above I respectfully ask you to issue a FAVORABLE report on HB640.

Sincerely,

David Mosher

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