



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

February 26, 2025

Delegate C.T. Wilson, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
230 & 231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Opposition for House Bill 1036 – Public Utilities – Generating Stations – Generation and Siting (Renewable Energy Certainty Act)

Dear Delegate Wilson,

The Board of County Commissioners of Washington County, Maryland (the “Board”) writes to express its strong opposition to House Bill 1036 the Renewable Energy Certainty Act, which is currently under consideration in the Economic Matters Committee. As an elected body the Board is invested in the well-being of our community and state and believe that this legislation undermines the Board’s ability to analyze and determine appropriate land use policies for the county. These attempts to apply one-size-fits-all mandates usurp the Board’s ability to provide reasonable and responsible local governance.

Allowing Solar Energy Generating Systems (SEGS) and Energy Storage Devices (ESDs) to locate anywhere in the rural areas of our community will have long term detrimental effects as outlined below:

1. Renewable energy projects should pay their fair share of taxes rather than shifting costs to homeowners and businesses. Exemption of SEGS from personal and real property tax provides an unfair advantage to one industry. No singular industry should receive special treatment at the expense of local taxpayers.
2. This bill sets forth unfunded mandates thereby shifting financial burdens onto taxpayers while energy companies profit. This bill pushes more responsibility onto counties to enforce and monitor state mandated regulations with costs falling to local taxpayers.
3. This bill does not provide a balanced approach between the siting of renewable energy projects and local land use policies related to agriculture, preservation and economic development.
 - a. SEGS encumber significant amounts of prime farmland that are lost to active production for decades. Loss of productive agricultural land will have negative local and regional impacts on this economic sector. Reductions in crops and animal products will cause higher prices due to lack of supply.
 - b. We urge the members to take into account the contradicting policies of the State as they relate to land preservation efforts. The Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 required counties to adopt priority preservation areas (PPAs) to further support and enhance profitable agricultural and forestry enterprises. This bill will undermine the efforts for land preservation in these state-mandated areas and land preservation efforts in general.
4. This bill does not address the larger issues related to distribution of power generated by these uses into the national grid. Without proper planning to effectively and efficiently locate renewable energy projects where they can use existing infrastructure to connect to the national grid, further disruptions to rural and suburban communities will occur. Additional infrastructure such as high energy power lines will need to be built, thereby exacerbating impacts on our community.

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5. Public safety is an important concern that has not been addressed by this bill. Utility scale battery storage and transmission projects bring serious risks, including fires and grid instability. Counties must have a say in the location of these facilities to ensure appropriate emergency response efforts to protect our citizens.
6. This bill subverts the intent of developing a Comprehensive Plan. By allowing these uses to occur anywhere in a local jurisdiction, it overrides the comprehensive visions of long-term growth plans. It allows one particular land use to supersede the thoughtful and analytical efforts of a community to plan for preservation, agriculture and economic development through best management practices.
7. We are concerned that these amendments will open the door to permitting these facilities on already permanently preserved land. There have been other cases where commercial uses that are not directly related to the conservation of agricultural practices have been permitted on preserved land that was intended to protect and enhance the agriculture industry.

In addition to these specific comments, the Board notes its disappointment in the dismissal of significant efforts by Maryland Association of Counties and other stakeholders in their attempt to draft a compromise bill that acknowledged the need for renewable energy projects while still allowing local governments to integrate those future demands into a well-rounded and comprehensive land use solution. Several months of discussion and exchange of ideas appear to be abandoned for a more favorable outcome for the renewable energy industry.

It is the Board's consensus that this bill is overreaching and severely influenced by one specific industry without consideration to local expertise and input. It usurps local zoning and land use policies while producing unfunded mandates that will unfairly affect local budgets and impacts on local citizens. For these reasons, and others that may be brought to light during the testimony period for this bill, the Board strongly recommends that the committee provide an unfavorable report for this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. If you have any questions or concerns, we are open and willing to have further discussion.

Sincerely,

Board of County Commissioners
of Washington County, Maryland

By: 
John F. Barr, President