



Testimony on HB 640 – House Economic Matters Committee
February 20, 2025 – Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity – Overhead Transmission Lines –
Conservation Easements
Kristin Kirkwood, Chair Forever Maryland

Position: Favorable

Forever Maryland represents Maryland's land trust community. Local land trusts are valuable partners in the efforts to preserve the most important farms, forests and ecological areas in the state. We work side by side with state and local government to reach Maryland's goal of permanently preserving 40% of the state by the year 2040.

Maryland's local land trusts work with landowners, farmers, and foresters throughout the state who voluntarily choose to preserve their land in perpetuity. We help landowners find the programs best suited to their needs. We sit with them and their family members as they make the decision that will affect their family for generations to come. This is not a decision made lightly. Regardless of the program they choose there is always an underlying sense of relief that they have done all they can to protect the land they love and the resources on that land for the future.

Conservation easements are not one-way exchanges. The public benefits greatly from the permanent preservation of privately owned land – local food, wildlife habitat, clean water, reduced tax burden, economic opportunity, and so much more. And in great part, the public has directly invested in these privately conserved lands as most of the conservation easements programs in Maryland are funded by either state or local transfer taxes.

The recent proposal to cut through 70 miles of Maryland farms, forests, wetlands, historic areas and ecological treasures affects many of the families who have voluntarily decided to protect their land. They are now devastated to think that despite their best efforts, the farm will no longer look the same, the fields, forests and streams will no longer function the same, and the farm will certainly not have either the ecological or economic value that it did before the transmission lines were put in place. They feel betrayed.

There is no doubt that it is easier and cheaper to site linear infrastructure across a series of larger, undeveloped properties. But in the noble goal of preserving Maryland's open space for future generations, have we unwittingly placed a bullseye on these preserved properties?

Forever Maryland strongly supports HB 640 which simply requires that an applicant for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity at the Public Service Commission minimize the impact of overhead transmission lines on land subject to a permanent conservation easement and change the proposed route if necessary to minimize said impact. It is a common-sense approach, one that

recognizes the state's role in upholding the commitment made both by the landowners who preserved their property and the taxpayers who financed many of those easements.

Thank you for helping to make sure that our most important farms, forests and ecological areas are indeed protected in perpetuity.