

# Protecting the Land that Sustains Us

February 26, 2025

Dear Members of the Education, Energy and Environment and Economic Matters Committees,

We, the undersigned organizations **strongly oppose SB931/ HB1036** because the bill disregards the imperative for establishing and maintaining guard rails for the siting of commercial scale solar and battery storage facilities. Maryland's forests, farmland, and water quality are all at risk. The legislation as written will undermine decades of taxpayer funded protections for critical natural resources at both the state and local level. The result is a radical upending of rural economies and loss of finite resources. The bill does not make use of available tools for siting large scale industrial solar and battery storage that would balance with these important priorities. These well-established best practices include incentivizing solar on less-fertile, already disturbed lands, and prohibiting installations on steep slopes among many other sound provisions.

Increasing the state's renewable energy generation is critical. We need a responsible and good faith measure promoting solar. Such a proposal would include guardrails to avoid broadly undermining the decades of conservation gains achieved by state and local agencies in partnership with our organizations. Balance is key.

Throughout the state, examples of efforts to carefully balance solar industry with resource protection exist. Montgomery County, for example, through well considered zoning update has opened their Agricultural Reserve to three square miles of solar installations on sub-prime soils. In fact, over 5 thousand commercial and residential solar projects have been constructed throughout the county over just the last 4 years. Some arguing for overly permissive legislation such as this bill, declare that zoning that conditions solar deployment, such as in Montgomery County's Reserve, results in untenable barriers to expansion of solar. Yet the Montgomery County Planning Department's two year study of the status of the effect of solar zoning provision the Ag Reserve concluded that the true hurdle is not the County's zoning that protects prime soils but rather PJM's well documented interconnection backlog for large renewable energy projects and local utility company capacity.

Montgomery County is one of a number of Maryland counties that, over decades, have implemented balanced protections for finite farmland and natural resources- gains that would be erased when this bill allows the State unilateral override of local master planning and zoning authority.

Without the addition of language that upholds and respects local jurisdictions' efforts to balance solar deployment with long standing conservation goals, we strongly oppose this bill as introduced.

Respectfully,

ACQ (Ask the Climate Question)

Asset Strategies, LLC

Alliance for Regional Cooperation

BannerBee Company LLC

Amber Blue Galleries

Beauty Blooms Farm

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of Americas (B-CC IWLA)	Friends of Ten Mile Creek & Little Seneca Reservoir
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate	Historic Medley District, Inc.
Boyds Civic Association	Lewis Orchards
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Environmental Justice Ministry	Little Falls Watershed Alliance
Chestnut Ridge Farm	Montgomery Agricultural Producers (MAP)
Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights	Montgomery Countryside Alliance
Clean Water Action	Montgomery County Civic Federation Inc
Coalition for Transit Alternatives to Midcounty Highway Extended (TAME)	Montgomery County Farm Bureau
Coalition to Stop Stream Destruction	Montgomery Preservation, Inc.
Community FarmShare	Nick's Organic Farm
Comus Sky Farm	ParkView Farms
Conservation Montgomery	Savage Acres Farm
Core Yoga, Kensington	Shepherd's Hey Farm
Dickerson Community Association	Stelo Nursery Garden
DRDs GotYourSix Farms	Sugarloaf Citizens Association
Ecosystems Study Group	Sugarloaf Regional Trails
Equestrian Partners in Conservation (EPIC)	The Farm at Our House
Friends of St Clements Bay	Tiewyan Farms
	West Montgomery County Citizens Association