

Testimony in Support of HB0081

Maryland Senate Committee on Judicial Proceedings

21 January 2025

Dear Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Stop MPRP, Inc. to express my strong support for HB0081, also known as the "Protect Maryland Farm Lands Act." This bill is a critical step toward ensuring fair treatment and valuation of agricultural properties in condemnation proceedings, thereby protecting Maryland's farmers and the state's agricultural heritage.

HB0081 establishes that the fair market value of actively used farm or agricultural properties subject to condemnation proceedings must be set at 350% of the highest appraisal value of the property. This ensures that the unique value of agricultural land is appropriately recognized, particularly when such properties are taken for public projects, such as the construction or maintenance of transmission lines.

This legislation is vital for the following reasons:

1. **Fair Compensation for Farmers:** By mandating a valuation at 350% of the highest appraisal, HB0081 ensures that farmers receive compensation reflective of their land's true value and importance. This measure safeguards against undervaluation that often pressures landowners to negotiate under duress.
2. **Preservation of Agricultural Lands:** The bill aligns with Maryland's broader commitment to maintaining farmland for its economic, environmental, and cultural benefits. As articulated in the Tax – Property Article §8–209, the preservation of open space and farmland contributes to food security and community well-being.
3. **Addressing Economic Pressures:** Agricultural land has inherently less monetary value due to zoning restrictions that limit its use for development. These restrictions, while critical for preserving farmland, make it difficult for farmers to receive equitable compensation when their land is condemned. HB0081 provides essential protection by ensuring that valuations reflect the unique and indispensable role of farmland.
4. **Discouraging Targeting of Agricultural Land:** By requiring a premium valuation for agricultural land in condemnation proceedings, HB0081 discourages developers from targeting these properties for easements or infrastructure projects. This provision helps protect farmland from unnecessary encroachment and preserves it for agricultural use.

Maryland has long been a leader in fostering agricultural resilience and sustainability. However, it is important to note that the language of HB0081 should not serve as upper limit on the costs borne by developers. Any additional loss of revenue or income resulting from the condemnation should be considered separate and distinct from the appraised value of the property itself. This ensures that

landowners are fully compensated for all financial impacts beyond the valuation of the land, providing comprehensive protection for their interests.

The committee may also want to consider an amendment to HB0081 that increases the remuneration to 350% of lost profits due to the condemnation, in addition to the 350% of the highest appraised value of the property. This would further enhance protections for farmers and ensure they are made whole for the broader economic impacts of losing productive agricultural land.

I urge you to support HB0081 and ensure its swift passage. This legislation is a necessary step in preserving Maryland's agricultural legacy and promoting fair treatment for landowners.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this important legislation. Please feel free to contact me if you require further insights or assistance regarding HB0081.

Respectfully,
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