



House Bill 640

Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity - Overhead Transmission Lines - Conservation Easements

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 20, 2025

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 640. This bill places additional considerations and requirements for transmission lines seeking to go on areas under a conservation easement.

The 2025 Maryland General Assembly is facing a historic number of complex generational challenges. One of the loudest issues to arise has been Maryland opposition to the Piedmont Reliability Project. The Project, which crosses Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties, effectively creates an “extension cord” across some of our state’s prime agricultural lands, providing Pennsylvania-generated energy to Virginia-based data centers, with little direct benefit to Marylanders. As the General Assembly debates how to address this and other energy challenges, one of the biggest underlying issues will be how to prioritize now competing state priorities (i.e., energy demands and environmental goals).

Since the 1960s, counties and the State have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into conservation, and to date, counties have actively limited development in these preserved areas. The intent of HB 640 is to respond to the Piedmont Project by requiring both the PSC to more deeply consider the impact of projects on conserved lands and for the applicant to more thoroughly justify why a project must overlap with these sensitive areas. As transmission infrastructure upgrades may uniquely be accomplished by upgrading existing lines or using existing land, counties join the sponsor in wanting to protect the finite number of conserved lands.

This is commonsense legislation which seeks to address conflicts between Maryland’s growing demand for energy and billions invested into other pro-climate policies to date. For this reason, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 640 a **FAVORABLE** report.