



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Bill No.: HB1396 - Property Rights Protection Act of 2025

COMMITTEE: House Economic Matters Committee

HEARING DATE: March 6, 2025

SPONSORS: Delegates Rose, Pippy, Adams, Arentz, Baker, Beauchamp, Bouchat, Buckel, Chisholm, Ghrist, Grammer, Griffith, Hartman, Hinebaugh, Hornberger, Hutchinson, Jacobs, Kipke, Mangione, McComas, Metzgar, Miller, T. Morgan, Nkongolo, Otto, Reilly, Schmidt, Stonko, Tomlinson, and Valentine

POSITION: Favorable

I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of **House Bill 1396**, the **Property Rights Protection Act of 2025**, which prohibits the use of **eminent domain** for the construction of power lines and renewable energy projects, protecting **private property rights, farmland, and conservation easements**.

This legislation is critical to **preserving Maryland's rural communities**, ensuring that private landowners retain control over their property and preventing **unjust takings** for infrastructure projects that primarily benefit corporate interests. **I urge the committee to issue a favorable report** for this essential bill to uphold Maryland's longstanding commitment to **land conservation, agricultural sustainability, and local autonomy**.

Negative Impact on Property Values

The construction of high-voltage transmission lines has been shown to **significantly reduce property values**, particularly for homes and farms near the right-of-way (ROW). A 2018 study published in the *Journal of Real Estate Research* found that vacant lots located near high-voltage transmission lines sold for **44.9% less** than similar properties farther away, and lots within 1,000 feet of transmission lines saw values drop by **17.9%**¹. The **Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP)** poses a major threat to property values in Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties, where **65 residential buildings are located within 200 feet of the ROW, and an additional 234 homes are within 200-500 feet of the proposed transmission corridor**. This will not only **financially harm hundreds of homeowners** but also **decrease the overall tax base**, impacting local schools, infrastructure, and community services.

¹ *The Electrifying Factor Affecting Your Property's Value*, Wall Street Journal (August 15, 2018) online at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-electrifying-factor-affecting-your-property-s-value-1534343506> (reporting that vacant lots adjacent to high-voltage transmission lines sell for 45% less than equivalent lots not located near transmission lines. Non-adjacent lots still located within 1,000 feet of transmission lines sell at a discount of 18%).



Protecting Maryland's Agricultural and Conservation Lands

Maryland has long been a national leader in land preservation, with programs like the **Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)** and the **Rural Legacy Program** safeguarding thousands of acres from development. **HB1396 strengthens these efforts** by preventing state and corporate entities from using eminent domain to seize protected lands for energy projects.

- **Impact on Conservation Easements:** The proposed **MPRP** and similar initiatives threaten over **1,800 acres of conserved land**, fragmenting vital habitats and undermining decades of environmental protection efforts.
- **Farmland Protection:** Transmission line construction disrupts agricultural operations, diminishing soil productivity, **devaluing farmland**, and making it difficult for farmers to sustain their businesses.
- **Water and Environmental Integrity:** The expansion of transmission lines over preserved lands **increases erosion, stormwater runoff, and pollution**, endangering **Maryland's waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay**.

Defending Property Rights from Corporate Overreach

The right to **private property ownership** is a fundamental principle of our democracy, and **HB1396 ensures that private citizens, not corporate utility companies, decide how their land is used**.

- **Landowners should not be forced to surrender property for private energy projects** that provide no direct benefit to them.
- **HB1396 ensures that local communities retain decision-making power**, requiring that any new transmission projects **secure voluntary agreements** rather than relying on state-mandated land seizures.

Economic and Community Impact

The forced construction of new transmission lines through eminent domain leads to:

- **Declining property values** for affected homeowners and farms.
- **Loss of generational farmland**, disrupting the state's rural economy.
- **Reduction in tourism and outdoor recreation**, which rely on **Maryland's scenic landscapes and protected open spaces**.



Meanwhile, alternatives to new transmission lines—**such as upgrading existing infrastructure and utilizing distributed energy resources**—offer a **more sustainable, community-driven approach** to addressing energy needs.

Conclusion

HB1396 is a necessary and responsible step to ensure that **Maryland’s property owners, conservation lands, and rural communities are protected from corporate land grabs and unnecessary transmission projects.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report on HB1396** and protect **Maryland’s land, people, and future generations.**

Respectfully submitted,

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