

Testimony in Support of HB 631

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brenda Myers, and I am writing today to express my support for House Bill 631 (HB 631), a critical piece of legislation that upholds property rights and ensures the integrity of Maryland's agricultural and conservation easements. This bill is a necessary safeguard against the misuse of eminent domain to seize protected land for industrial development projects, including high-voltage transmission lines like the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP).

HB 631 amends Maryland's Real Property Law (Section 12-101) to prohibit the state, its agencies, and local governments from using eminent domain to take land that is protected by permanent agricultural or conservation easements. This means that landowners who have committed to preserving their farms or forests cannot be forced to surrender their property for projects that undermine those very protections.

This legislation ensures that a promise made is a promise kept—if Maryland has granted a conservation easement to protect land, it must stand by that agreement and not allow corporate interests to override those protections.

The MPRP: A Case Study in Eminent Domain Overreach

The Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP) is a proposed high-voltage transmission line that threatens to seize hundreds of acres of farmland, forests, and conserved lands. Utility and energy developers, backed by PJM Interconnection, seek to push this project through private property, often against the will of landowners. Many affected properties include land placed under conservation easements—agreements specifically designed to protect these lands from industrial development.

If HB 631 is not passed, projects like the MPRP will continue to erode landowner rights and undermine Maryland's long-standing commitments to farmland preservation and environmental conservation.

HB 631 ensures that land protected under programs like:

The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)

The Maryland Environmental Trust

County conservation easements

Other state and local farmland preservation programs cannot be taken through eminent domain for transmission lines or similar projects.

This bill provides the legal protection necessary to prevent corporate utilities from exploiting landowners who have already committed their property to conservation.

HB 631 Matters to Landowners and Maryland's Future

1. Restoring Trust in Conservation Agreements

For decades, Maryland farmers and conservationists have worked in good faith with the state to permanently protect land from development. However, recent attempts by transmission developers to override these protections have eroded trust in these agreements. HB 631 restores that trust by reinforcing the state's commitment to land preservation.

2. Preventing the Destruction of Farmland and Ecosystems

Eminent domain should not be a tool for corporate utilities to destroy protected farmland, forests, and conservation areas. HB 631 ensures that the state does not betray the very principles of land preservation by allowing industrial-scale infrastructure projects to override conservation efforts.

3. Protecting Property Rights from Corporate Utility Interests

Transmission companies and PJM Interconnection have repeatedly targeted protected lands for new infrastructure projects, despite the availability of alternative solutions such as undergrounding power lines, upgrading existing transmission infrastructure, and investing in localized energy generation. HB 631 ensures that landowners cannot be forced to surrender property that they have lawfully placed under conservation protections.

A Line in the Sand

HB 631 is more than just a bill—it is a declaration that **Maryland values its agricultural and conservation heritage over corporate profits**. The MPRP and similar projects represent a direct threat to property rights, farmland preservation, and environmental stewardship. By passing HB 631, Maryland lawmakers can send a clear message that protected land must remain protected, and that conservation commitments cannot be overridden for the sake of transmission expansion.

I urge this committee to support HB 631 and stand with Maryland's farmers, landowners, and conservation advocates in the fight to protect our land and our future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brenda Myers

Hampstead, Maryland