



February 26, 2025

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair

Delegate C.T. Wilson, Chair

Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee &

House Economic Matters Committee

Dear Senators and Delegates,

On behalf of the 300 individuals and families affiliated with Sugarloaf Citizens Association—a 501(c)(3) civic, environmental and farming advocacy group based in Dickerson, MD—I write in opposition to SB0931 / HB1036.

This bill, as written, would do way more harm than good. It is a major threat to the agriculture industry in the state—an industry that employs some 350,000 people (including 6,000 full-timer farmers) and contributes approximately \$8.2 billion to the state’s economy annually. One third of Maryland’s land—1.9 million acres—is in agriculture. Of that, 500,000 acres is prime farm land. This legislation would open up a significant part of that prime farmland for the siting of large-scale ground-based solar arrays.

We fully support enhanced renewable energy and policies that would add to the state’s renewable energy supply. But not at the expense of high-quality farmland and to the detriment of that vital industry in our state. There is ample space not on arable farmland to site solar facilities in the state of Maryland.

Utility-scale solar will permanently take thousands if not tens of thousands of acres of farmland out of production over the next decade—at a time when the Mid-Atlantic is being regarded as among the nation’s areas most resilient to climate change.

Moreover, the bill’s provisions are poorly crafted. They include threats to forested land, open space, and natural resources. In addition, the bill is a state “power grab” over the long-established purview county governments have over land-use decisions and zoning. And the bill as written would bar local taxation of solar projects—a ridiculous proposal which could have long-term adverse consequences to county governments.

The economics of the situation are by now well know. Solar companies can and will pay five to 10 times more to lease farmland than a farmer can pay a landowner. Sixty percent of farmland in Maryland is leased by farmers from landowners. Solar companies have

blanketed the state with such inquiries. We have received several at our 110-acre property in Dickerson.

Solar competition for ag land would drive up prices, placing farmland ownership out of reach for aspiring new farmers.

Maryland farming is a major financial engine and employer in Maryland. Maryland farms feed our local communities, the state's urban centers, our nation, and the world. Please reject SB0931 and HB1036.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Findlay". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Steven Findlay

President, Sugarloaf Citizens Association