



**Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 631 – Eminent Domain – Agricultural and Conservation Easements – Prohibited Taking**

Economic Matters Committee Hearing  
1:00 pm - March 6, 2025

3/4/25

To Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB631**, on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore local waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.

**As an organization that engages in large scale restoration practices to improve local water quality, farmers and agricultural lands are some of our most important partners and landscapes.** Many of the operators with whom we partner have land enrolled in conservation easements, and these easements serve as an important catalyst for increased environmental protections on Eastern Shore farmland. Woodlands, grasslands, and marshlands, all of which filter nutrients and slow runoff, are essential to meeting the State's environmental and Bay restoration goals. **Conservation easements provide critical security for these habitats, and should not ever be broken once the easement is awarded— regardless of current or future State infrastructure goals.**

**HB631** will ensure that when land owners, and the state of Maryland, make a commitment to land conservation— that commitment is upheld not only for the sake of the environment it protects, but also for the protection of substantial state and federal investments that are often made within conservation easements.

Maryland's Eastern Shore is defined by its "open space" and rural character. Preserving these open spaces limits development and impervious infrastructure, which reduces runoff pollution in local waterways, as well as buffers our communities and existing infrastructure from rising tides, storm surge, and stormwater flooding. **For these reasons we urge the committee to adopt a favorable report for HB631.**

Sincerely,  
**Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper**, on behalf of:

**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director  
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper  
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper